LETTERS OF AN AMERICAN JEW

WHO KNOWS BETTER MUST SAY SO!

ELMER BERGER

WITH A 1969 INTRODUCTION

THE INSTITUTE FOR PALESTINE STUDIES

Who Knows Better

Must Say So !

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by

Elmer Berger

THE INSTITUTE FOR PALESTINE STUDIES

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THE INSTITUTE FOR PALESTINE STUDIES
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NOTE TO SECOND IMPRESSION

At the request of the Institute for Palestine Studies the author has kindly given his permission for *Who Knows Better Must Say So!* to be reprinted.

WHERE I FOUND THE TITLE OF THIS BOOKLET

After we left the Middle East, we spent three weeks in Europe—including a week in Holland visiting with friends.

Before we left, these friends gave me a beautiful little book which tells the history of the Dutch people's efforts to wrest their land from the sea—and then to keep the sea from the newly created land.

The story goes back centuries—long before anyone dreamed of anything like Holland's modern hydro-engineering techniques. And in the earliest days, there were bitter battles over how and where the sea should be driven out and arable land be made to take its place. Sometimes the fishermen who lived from the sea were reluctant to see a certain favorite basin dyked-in, pumped dry and planted with grain.

At least some of these decisions were made in what was apparently a kind of democratic debate. And one of the rules for these debates was, "He who knows better must say so."

"He who knows better" about any public issue "must say so." Even before Mr. Coleman, Mr. Rosenwald and others in the Council suggested the publication of these letters, it seemed to me this pungent sentence epitomized the opposite side of the coin of freedom.

We are all zealous for our rights. But prudence, sanctions, social standing, economic pressures, family sensibilities—the list is endless—often make us less than zealous in the moral exercise of our rights.

"Who knows better" is not intended in any qualitative sense. You may say—if you wish: "He only thinks he knows better."

Perhaps. But what I think is based, in this pamphlet, on what I saw. I am honored to be associated in this pamphlet—and in the American Council for Judaism—with men who believe if there are sound, honest reasons and facts for believing one knows better than the usual pattern of information available about a public issue, such a person "must say so."

I can only hope—humbly—that on the complex problem with which these letters treat they may truly help others a little to "know better"; and then, knowing better, that they may also feel the moral compulsion to use their precious American right to "say so."

Elmer Berger

August 10, 1955

INTRODUCTION – 1969

"A true witness delivereth souls;
But he that breatheth forth lies is all deceit."
Proverbs XIV:25.

It is fifteen years since I wrote the letters in this book. They were addressed to the then past-President and President of what, at the time, was a courageous and principled group of Jews whom I served as chief executive officer. And, at the time, I considered it a testament to their courage and vision that they were eager to publish these letters, unedited.

Through the years the book has had a wide readership, with five previous editions. The original letters still stand in this present volume, unchanged, as they came these fifteen years ago, fresh and uninhibited from the interviews, the scenes of hope and despair, which we witnessed on that—our first trip to the Middle East. And now a group of serious scholars concerned with the Palestine problem has expressed an interest in reprinting the book.

This generous offer arouses mixed emotions in me. It would be untrue to say this present interest is not gratifying. Sometimes, apparently, the kind of stuff which might be found in yesterday's newspapers is not really and irrevocably dead. But precisely this quality infuses a large measure of sadness and even cynicism into my undeniable pleasure at the prospect of a new edition of the book. For those familiar with the Palestine problem know that the Institute for Palestine Studies is not wanting for material to publish. One of the more hopeful phenomena in this tragic, fifty year-old controversy over Palestine is the steadily improving quality and quantity of information which provides facts—and fair interpretations of the facts—to compete with the plethora of Zionist propaganda. For half a century (with accelerating frenzy and quantity since the middle 1940's) Zionist propaganda has inundated the Western world. The phenomenon, hopefully, peaked-out in June of 1967. But on its way to its climax, by distortions, by deliberate deception—together with an admitted Arab ineptness—it completely prejudiced Western public opinion in its assessment of the roles of aggressor and victims in the 1967 chapter of the Arab/Zionist/Israel war.

It is some testament to the spirit of the Arabs that among the earliest

lessons they admitted to learning, following the military defeat, was the inadequate way in which they had portrayed their own case. But they also resolved to improve their information service. It is, perhaps, one of the ironies in the wake of the war that this determination, which has been gradually implemented and of which the Institute is a commendable example, must reflect some Arab faith in world opinion—once the facts are responsibily told. The attitude of the Israelis, on the other hand, seems to suggest they are turning inward. In surly and even arrogant tones they thumb their noses at the "majority" of the world, most dramatically illustrated in their contemptuous defiance of the United Nations.

Their Zionist minions in countries other than Israel indulge in insulting and unjustifiable accusations of "anti-semitism" directed at all who, with time having restored some perspective, are coming to new and better-balanced conclusions about those cataclysmic days of 1967.

All these considerations make it gratifying to have renewed interest in these published letters. But there is also the reaction of sadness which, at times, borders on despair. For the decision to reprint the book, despite increasing amounts of new writing, suggests that the basic questions, which the fifteen-year-old publication delineated, still remain. Despite altered power-relationships, violated armistice lines, despite the passing of some of the personalities encountered in these pages and the emergence of new ones, despite layer upon layer of United Nations legislation—in a stubbornly, elemental way the basics of the Arab/Zionist/Israel confrontation have not changed in definition, or been in any way eroded by diversions of propaganda or military adventures. In fact, in some ways, this fifteen-year old recountal of those fundamentals may serve the purposes of clarification better than some of the new efforts analyzing secondary developments since 1955. In the main, all these subsequent actions—both diplomatic and military—have been diversions. For the most part they were initiated by the Zionist/Israel party to the conflict. The Suez war of 1956, the illusion of "peace" created by the United Nations peace-keeping machinery, (a "peace" which, by 1966, Israel was finding a burden in terms of her inflated economy and the dwindling of the "charitable" contributions, largely from American Zionists, which subsidize her economy), Israel's stepped-up incursions into the de-militarized zones, particularly those involved in the Syrian-Israeli armistice agreements, her incitement of world opinion about the ambiguous and obscure conditions of Soviet Jews, her efforts to capitalize on those inevitable rip-tides of political change which mirror the struggle of the Arab States to find their true identity and their relationship to one another following the end of the colonial period—all these served to encourage those who were too eager to overlook, or downgrade the unrelenting force of the unrequited injustices at the core of the Palestine problem.

It was no particular perspicacity on my part, in 1955, which enabled me to write these letters from which the basic ingredients of the problem clearly emerge. True, by 1955 I had been involved in the Palestine problem, as an anti-Zionist, for a dozen years. I had read extensively and I had enjoyed the opportunity of many first-hand conversations with

personalities from the Middle East who had visited the United States. But I had never visited the area. When we did visit first, in 1955, many doors were opened to us. And if, indeed, this book focuses on the fundamentals of the tragically continuing problem, this fortunate result came about because—at least in the Arab world—responsible and knowledgeable personalities levelled with me. My experience may have helped me ask some of the right questions. But I have been deeply indebted, ever since, to those who patiently and in candor provided answers.

That combination of adequate preparation and then meeting with earnest men, glad to respond to honest and eager curiosity about the facts, is still an experience possible for anyone seriously concerned with peace in the Middle East. It is a sad commentary on the statesmen and the establishment-commentators of the Western world that, despite the abundance of words written and spoken about Palestine, the fundamentals in the problem are not yet clearly defined in the public mind. In fact, more than a little evidence suggests these fundamentals are sedulously avoided by those who command the widest audiences. And some of us are beginning to suspect that there is a direct relationship between the techniques of evasion and popularity. These statesmen and commentators must know the truth; and it must be considerations other than respect for the facts—together with some equitable value-judgment of those facts—which have prevented the great powers from contributing more than adhesive-plaster expediencies to stop the hemorrhaging for all these years. It is small wonder that the open sore in the Middle East not only has not healed, but has grown and festered. And, as in all living tissue, the indigenous cells struggle for healing, for normal growth and restoration of historic function.

In the gaping wound of the Arab/Israel/Zionist tragedy it is the Palestinians who are—and have been—the normal cell tissue. For decades now, the great powers—and Israel—have done their best to avoid recognition of the fact that a stabilization of the lives of these human beings is the basic, indispensable and inescapable prescription which will restore health. The bromides and aspirins have failed. And before the final chapter of the Palestine story is written Israel's "pre-emptive war" in 1967, its continuing occupation of Arab territories and its uprooting of a new population of "refugees" may prove to have produced one surprising result. That would be the restoration to world attention of the dispossessed Palestinian nation. This may yet prove to be the real anti-body, created by the living tissues of the wound itself, which will rebuild a structure of political stability, justice and equity in the area.

It is too early to tell. But the growing resistance movements suggest the possibility. And if it happens—and if it does it will be at great cost and more tragedy—the Palestinians will have forced the issue, themselves. If they do, the result will be a beautiful example of historic, even poetic, justice. The real David and Goliath story in this needlessly spun-out tragedy is the extent to which the Palestinians have already revived the world's memory of Palestine.

I have hurriedly re-read these letters which I wrote fifteen years ago.

The simple, nearly one-dimensional reporting of situations and conversations seems to forecast all these developments, although at the time—as I recall—I did not believe the power-structure of the world would allow the situation so to deteriorate for so long. But those who have, for all these years, had the power to alter the course of history have failed to face the basic facts; and those who knew—and substantially understood the basic facts—have never been welcomed beyond the anterooms of the power structure.

This includes, for the most part, the conscientious and knowledgeable officers in the United States Department of State. It was only coincidence that the first of these letters, written from shipboard, reported a stimulating conversation with an American Foreign Service officer. We, who have been anti-Zionists in the United States, have usually had a warm welcome at the desk-officer level and even at the level of Assistant Secretaries in our Department of State. These men are in daily touch with the situation in the area itself. Their problem—as it is ours—is that they almost never break through to the White House, much less to the Congress. And between the White House and the Congress, the expertise of the United States Governmental process is lost in the domestic political power-play. There is now abundant, documentary proof of this fact. The volumes of *Foreign Relations of the United States*, covering the Middle East for 1944-1945, are now available to the public. They contain hundreds of pages of previously classified information, mostly intra-Governmental position papers and memoranda. They provide indispensable illumination for anyone genuinely interested in learning why the United States has failed to act in its own national interests in the Palestine problem—let alone in the interests of that equity and justice for the people of the area, without which there can be no peace. These papers are replete with the prophetic warnings of our skilled and professional diplomats in the middle forties that if the United States continued to give support to Zionist political-territorial aspirations, the balance of power in the Middle East would shift dangerously to the detriment of the United States and the West.

Little in this pattern had changed by 1967. In June of that year, I contacted the most responsible people in the Department of State. I was eager to learn from them what the Administration was thinking and to share ideas which those of us who had some experience with the problem might be able to contribute. I was informed—sadly—"Don't waste your time talking to us. The President has brought Bundy, Katzenbach and Wheeler into his confidence on this. We are the last people he wants to see." McGeorge Bundy had been out of government for a year. Nicholas Katzenbach was still cleaning off his desk in the Department of Justice; and General Wheeler's familiarity with the Middle East, on any first hand basis, was at least a decade behind events. It is no wonder that from the White House emerged a "policy" geared to the traditional deference to domestic Zionist pressures and the Middle East forces of the 1950's.

Another theme that emerges from these letters—and which has played a continuing role in the confused images most people outside the Middle East entertain about the problem—is found in the reports of my conver-

sations with the young man from the Israeli Foreign Ministry, immediately upon our arrival in the country. The Israelis prefer to talk about "progress," "industrialization," "know-how." They still prefer *not* to talk about "rights" or "political equities"—and least of all about Zionism, which continues as the ideological basis of their concept of nationality. It is intriguing today, fifteen years after these conversations, to speculate about Israeli insistence that their accomplishments in the technological field entitle them to certain political and even human advantages over the Arabs.

This "pragmatic" mentality may be precisely one of the elements which is losing them their earlier virtual monopoly on Western public opinion. It is too early in the history of the general protest movement of the West to be sure. But smug Israeli claims to pick up the "white man's burden" in the Middle East strike some discordant notes in a Western culture experiencing some revulsion at technocracy, scientism, bureaucratic—as against human consciousness.

Also, in Israel, there were my heart-warming talks with those who at the time were carrying the torch of Judah Magnes—still advocating some form of bi-national or multi-cultural state which would, on a basis of one-man-one-vote, accommodate the Palestine Arabs. It remains a source of some small hope that these views still survive in Israel, although in new and younger advocates and in the new and different political context.

There is, for example, the young scholar Uri Davis, at the Hebrew University, who only a few weeks before I write this declared with refreshing candor to an international audience in Jerusalem ,

> "The Palestinian struggle against Israel today is not motivated by the mere historical fact that Israel was initiated in sin [the sin of denying the existence of an Arab population in Palestine and the need for expropriating its land if the *Zionist state* was to be realized], but because Israel has done nothing to expiate and atone for her sin. Not only did Israel refuse to admit her sinful birth and atone for it in concrete practice, but this refusal has, as so often happens, led her to repeat it twice. Both after the 1956 and after the 1967 war Israel annexed Arab territory. It is this, and not Israel's original sin, that has brought the Middle East conflict to such monstrous escalation."[1]

What is so tragic to me, as an American Jew, is that neither my Government nor my co-religionists here, where the potential for peace or more war in the Middle East is so great, pays any more attention to these "doves" in Israel today than they paid to the predecessors I met in 1955. Uncritically, American Jews still pour their millions into the Zionist-controlled fund-raising apparatus which supports the Zionist-military complex as the power-center of Israel;[2] and the United States Government, despite substantial evidence suggesting the impropriety—perhaps

[1] Paper delivered to War Resisters International, Jerusalem, August 1969, p. 6.

[2] For a detailed exposition of this fact see, *Israel Without Zionists*, Uri Avnery, The Macmillan Co., N.Y. 1968. Mr. Avnery is a member of the Israeli Knesset.

even the illegality—of some of the programs supported by these tax-deductible "charity" contributions, continues to indulge the export to Israel of hundreds of millions of dollars a year.[1]

In fact, the vicious circle feeds on itself and prolongs the crisis in the Middle East. For the United States Government is intimidated by the very size of these "voluntary" contributions. The size of the contributions must be largely attributed to the fact that they are deductible items from United States income tax. The contributions support policies which are inconsistent with, at least, stated American policy; and the actual failure of the United States Government to implement stated policy can be explained, substantially, only by the pressures exerted by the Zionist forces in domestic politics. When it is realized that, for all practical purposes, the Zionist and Israeli treasury funds are part of the same "family" fund, the charade becomes complete. The United States budget, indirectly at least, is financing a policy which is inconsistent with declared Governmental policy; and this, in turn, costs the United States taxpayer more money to implement a policy which has been self-defeating for their country's national interests.

There is an uncomfortable amount of truth in the Arab claim that the United States subsidizes Israeli aggression and Israel's illegal occupation of Arab territory. For, in large part, these are "public funds," pouring out of the United States without restraint at a time when, on all fronts, Americans are being asked to curtail their expenditures of dollars abroad.

And finally, I have never forgotten the close reasoning and the calm logic with which the very highly placed Egyptian, a member of the original officer's corps which had led the 1952 revolution, said to me that the political question was not whether a state of Israel existed but what kind of a state Israel was to be and with what body-politic were the Arabs expected to make a settlement. Was it to be the Israel which, in 1955, was still the spearhead of Zionist expansionism, seeking sufficient territory to "repatriate" all of "the Jewish people" and to be overlords of the Middle East? Or was it to be a Middle Eastern state, acknowledging its desire to be part of the area by recognizing the rights of the Palestinians which had been inscribed in every international agreement about Palestine? Was it to be an exclusivist Zionist state in which "Jews" were more equal than others, by virtue of the very definition of its Zionist nationality? Or was it really to be an open, democratic society in which others than Jews, with these recognized rights to equal citizenship, would be included?

I had been an anti-Zionist all my conscious life and, for more than ten years before that forthright, lucid interview, had been actively engaged in spreading knowledge of anti-Zionism, in an organized way. It had been motivated, largely, by the integrity of my own spiritual tradition, trying

[1] For a detailed exposition of how much of this money is used for purposes other than "charity," see *Hearing*, "Activities of Non Diplomatic Representative of Foreign Principals in the United States," U.S. Senate, Parts 9 and 12, May 23, August 1, 1963. U.S. Government Printing Office.

to keep it separate and apart from the politics of Zionist nationalism. For I knew—as did many others—that *any* fusion of religion and politics corrupts the one and makes the other into a travesty of the liberal, open-society, democratic tradition. And I had been motivated by concern for the integrity of my own American nationality. For the central idea of Zionism, I knew, was the *ex cathedra*, authoritarian, legal-political claim that "the Jewish people" was a nationality entity which, in international law, had been recognized to have nationality rights in, and nationality obligations to, the Zionist political-territorial entity in Palestine. These had been my motivations. The perception and candid conversation with the Egyptian governmental official in 1955 gave me my first real insight into how relevant anti-Zionism was also to some settlement of the Arab/Zionist/Israel confrontation itself. And I have been grateful ever since.

When I returned to America and tried to explain this to people who professed concern and who said they wanted peace in the Middle East my observations were, unfortunately, dismissed as mere "ideology." They were, in fact, greeted in much the same way in Israel itself, a few weeks after the Cairo conversation. Now, fifteen years later, the "de-Zionization" of Israel is, of course, recognized as the key to the problem. It is the common theme of the various and sometimes differing resistance movements; and the idea receives increasing exposure in the Western press. Without here reviewing all of the many proposals for effectuating such a transformation of the present Zionist state, it must be said—for even superficial clarification—that "de-Zionization" means merely democratization. It means ending the exclusivist, discriminatory "basic" Zionist legislation of the Israeli state. It means refusing to condescend and to patronize with Israeli offers to "improve" the Middle East with their admitted (for the moment) "know-how." It means the ending of the deliberate legislation and societal structuring which has created the world's largest ghetto, with a ghetto mentality, re-inforced by militarism. It means ending the Israeli/Zionist attitude which holds the Arabs—particularly the Palestinians—to be "non-people." It means an end of Israeli musing about its Messianic role of saving "the Jewish people" from real, or imaginary, disabilities, no matter where Jews may live. It means an end of the United States subsidy, in the name of "charity," of the "central" national purpose of the Israeli state to recruit, enlist, immigration of Jews, particularly from "the countries of prosperity," to use authoritative Israeli language. And in place of this national policy it means substitution of a policy which would implement the inscribed legislation of the United Nations, providing the displaced Palestinians with a free choice between repatriation and compensation for those who may elect—after two decades—not to return.

That, not boundaries, or transit through the Suez Canal or the Straits of Tiran, or even the precise formulation of a way to govern Jerusalem, is the nub of the continuing war. That has always been at the root of the Palestine problem. And that is what my perceptive and gracious Egyptian friend clearly indicated to me in 1955.

It was Mr. Eban, in the days in 1967 when Israel was intoxicated with

its military power, who said the 1967 war had started because the Arabs—and particularly the President of the U.A.R.—had been bent upon what Eban called "politicide," the political extermination of a people.. Today, two years after the catastrophic conflict, the world is a little more sure that Mr. Eban was indulging in sinister and deliberately fabricated hyperbole.[1] In point of fact it is Israel and Zionism which not only threaten "politicide," by Mr. Eban's own definition of the term, but is practicing it against the Palestinians. It is Mr. Eban's Prime Minister, Mrs. Meir, who denies the existence of a Palestine people. It was Mr. Eban, himself, who denied that the Palestinians have any "role to play" in any eventual settlement.[2]

These attitudes reveal something about Zionism—and the power-structure of its Middle Eastern state—which students of the movement have known for a long time. There has always been an inborn contempt for the Arabs; what one contemporary scholar has called a "settler's mentality." Humanitarian "Zionists" recognized it from the very earliest days of the movement, in the closing years of the 19th century. Ahad Ha'am is, perhaps, the outstanding example. The general public, in more recent years, has been shielded from this face of Zionism. It has been misled by pompous declarations about democracy and even more pompous orations about how the Zionist experiment would "give the shirt off its back" to the Arabs. That was before Zionism and/or Israel had a shirt. Now that Zionism's minions stand—at least for the moment—in the dominant role, it turns out that the shirt which is offered is either full of holes, or if it is not of the threadbare genre, it is to be someone else's shirt Israel bears "no responsibility whatsoever" for "the plight of the Palestinians," her present Prime Minister keeps reiterating. "This is a humanitarian problem," she adds. The Arabs created it and "have turned this into a political problem."[3] This from one of the architects of the Zionist strategy a quarter of a century ago which insisted that the plight of Hitler's Jewish victims was not humanitarian but political, and then proceeded to insist the political price be paid by the Arabs who were a continent removed from the problem. And the West—led by the United States—has been an accessory before and after the fact of the ensuing political injustice which created the present human problem. It is no longer comprehensible to an American and a Jew how the United States and those Jews who claim some affinity with the great, prophetic spirits of their tradition, condone these attitudes. What is worse they continue actively to support the Zionist/Israel bureaucracy which advertises these attitudes as if they were virtues and self-righteously claim to be defending Western and democratic traditions by enforcing these attitudes at gunpoint in the Middle East itself.

If there is any answer it is that the American Government and American Jews—not without influence directly and indirectly on their fellow

[1] See, *Six Hundred Days*, A Reappraisal of the Arab/Israeli Confrontation Since June 1967, Howard Koch, Jr. Arab Information Office, N.Y. March 1969.

[2] For numerous other Israeli viewpoints on this question see "The Middle East Newsletter" (Special Issue) Vol. III, No.5 and 6, Americans for Justice in The Middle East, September 1969, Beirut, Lebanon.

[3] *Ibid :* p.2

citizens who are Christians—have constantly misread the Palestine problem. There is abundant evidence to suggest that they have judged the problem with a kind of Darwinian "pragmatism." Hitler slaughtered uncounted numbers of Europe's Jews. Put the rest in Palestine and be done with the problem and, incidentally, ease the conscience of a Western civilization which spawned Hitlerism. The Zionists want a state in Palestine. The majority population of that country are Christian (but Eastern Christian) and Moslems. Divide the country, regardless of demographic considerations and fundamental rights. Anyway, as Mr. Truman said, "How many Arab votes are there in the United States?" The indigenous population resists the arbitrary truncating of their country. Hail David who slew Goliath—and who is Goliath, anyhow! The Arabs succeed in having Palestinian-Arab rights inscribed in every major international agreement about Palestine. They must be the aggressors in all three of the wars since 1948, in each of which Zionist/Israel has eroded—in practice—some bit of these inscribed rights.

Despairing of justice and even recognition of their mere existence after 20 years during which the West has failed to bring its client state of Israel to terms with international legislation, the Palestinians take the law into their own hands and mount a resistance of violence. Israel—occupying territory of other states—must be right in super-retaliation in an effort to enforce the one cease-fire in the history of the United Nations which was not accompanied by insistence upon instant withdrawal. Israel is in violation of more negotiated United Nations resolutions than any other member state. But the Arabs are intransigent because they will not sit across a table now—ignoring all the defied and flouted international agreements—and make a final, complete and binding peace. The Zionist establishment, put into the Middle East in the first place contrary to even such political morality as obtained at the end of World War I, is now the arbiter of what is right and proper and acceptable in 1969.

None of these inconsistencies can be explained except by the cynicism, the "pragmatism"—which means love of power—which has operated as a virtue in the West; operated, that is, until these days of awe and terror which follow in the shambles of the Vietnam war. For it is there, in less than guarded ways and despite the bewildering rhetoric of a Johnson and a Nixon, that the possessor of power is really suing for an honorable peace. It is Vietnam which initiated a debate in American life in which the question was not so much the old pacifist question of whether all wars are evil, but whether this particular war is moral. And it is the fundamental conviction in wide—and widening—areas of American life that this war is immoral. This is the basis of the protest.

The Vietnam analogy to the fifty year war between Zionism and the legitimate, ineradicable rights of Palestine's Arabs is not perfect. But there are enough similarities to warrant its use by a number of scholars. As young Uri Davis—the Israeli— said, "Israel was initiated in sin." But what makes prolongation of the conflict with the Arabs inevitable is Israel's refusal "to expiate and atone for her sin." Thus speaks an Israeli!

An American Jew can add only that his country's policies and his

co-religionists' smug comfort in Israel's demonstrated power make them both accomplices in the immorality. Zionist pressure on both Jews and the United States Government stultify moral correctives of justice, of humanity, of respect for law which alone can resolve the Palestine problem without still another and more ghastly war. For the problem is essentially moral. Zionist diplomacy and mendacious politicians who take their cues from that diplomacy have successfully inflated geo-political questions like transit rights, borders, methods of negotiations into justifications for belligerency. But now the resistance cuts through all the verbiage and defines its goal as a unitary, democratic Palestine, in which all legitimate nationals of that country, without respect to race or creed, will be equals.

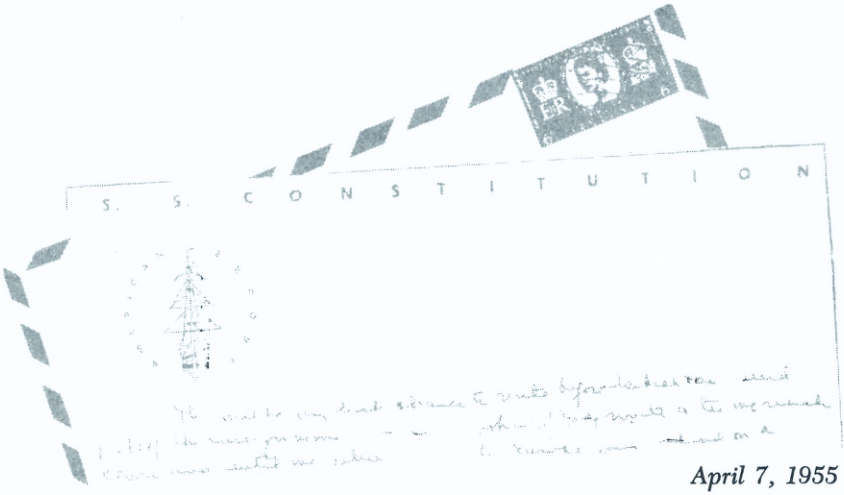
There are dozens of reasons why that objective is "unreal," though it is a little vague why it is any more unreal than many "peace in our time" formulas. But there is only one reason why serious statesmen should confront the proposition—even as an ideal—and then struggle valiantly to move the shattered pieces of Palestine and the shattered community of Palestinians as close as is humanly possible toward that goal.

The single reason is that the formula epitomizes—in political language—the professed ideals of the democratic states, as well as of the great spiritual traditions of our civilization. The complete realization of the ideal may be unattainable in any immediate formal prescription for peace. But serious and energetic efforts to approximate it would cleanse the West of the hypocrisy with which it has confronted Palestine for half a century. It would reverse the trend which, for half a century, has allowed Zionism's exclusivism in Palestine to fragment those human rights which our history and our consciences know are indivisible. Processes and trends of healing might then have a chance to overcome processes and trends of rending and tearing apart the legitimate heirs of a Palestine taking the shape of an open, egalitarian society instead of a Rhodesia or a South Africa.

"Tell us with what kind of an Israel we are supposed to make peace." That was the central question in 1955. It is still the central question. Perhap this is why it is both gratifying and sad that today there is serious interest in reprinting this book. I am honored at the interest and admiring of the sponsor and new publisher. My own—and I am sure their—most devoutly desired dedication for this new edition is that soon, very soon, these pages will have relevance only in a historical sense, no longer a window opening upon still visible, contentious issues of this Middle East war born half a century ago in political immorality and human injustices.

No one who understands the problem believes that any single effort can do more than ventilate a small area. I most earnestly hope the Institute for Palestine Studies will have reason to believe that, in reprinting this book, at least this modest purpose will have been served.

Elmer Berger
New York
September, 1969



April 7, 1955

ON BOARD S.S. CONSTITUTION

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:*

This will be my last chance to write before Gibraltar—and probably the last for some time since what I may write after we reach Cairo and until we return again to Europe will depend on a number of circumstances.

I have however, had two experiences which may be of some interest to you and since I have developed some kind of allergy anyhow and cannot soak up what is now very beautiful and warm sunshine, I shall try to report them.

The first happened a few days before we sailed. As you know, I was having difficulty obtaining visas for Israel. Soon after I returned from Dallas, I wrote a formal letter to Mr. Avram Harman, the Israeli Consul-General in New York. This was in addition to the routine application I had made some weeks earlier. Finally, it was arranged for me to meet Mr. Harman for lunch. The luncheon conversation turned out to be more of an inquiry as to *why* I wanted to go to Israel than a discussion of the visas. And from the enquiry we became involved, quite logically, in a very long, ideological discussion.

Harman asked me why I was interested in going to Israel. I told him I had no particular interest; that he knew my position; that I was also aware of its implications; that Israel itself was not the issue; that mostly I wanted to talk to people and was but little interested in buildings or *kibbutzim;* that I was not looking for trouble; and that, for my own part, I could do everything I wanted to do in Israel from a hotel room.

I think this disarmed him somewhat, although he remained more than a little suspicious. Finally he agreed to recommend that the visas be granted. I have only his word for it and will probably have no way of knowing whether he will make good or not until we try to cross the line.

When the official business was done, we settled down for a talk about ideologies. This is a little difficult to report because the conversation lasted late into the afternoon. I suppose it can be summarized by saying that it was all calm and even rather stimulating. But there is also the conclusion

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* (Lessing J. Rosenwald and Clarence L. Coleman Jr.)

we are just as far apart as the poles. There is simply no common ground whatsoever. He—like most Israeli Government people—is a thorough secularist. He does not have any feelings whatsoever about Judaism. His devotion to what he calls "the Jewish people" (not simply the State) is as deep and earnest as our devotion to America. As you or I—if necessitated by a crisis—would sacrifice our lives or fortunes for the future of our children in a free America, he admitted that Israel's Government is prepared to risk the future of the State in the interests of "the people." He even said if that were necessary it would increase the solidarity of "the people" who, presumably, would start again to build another state. This necessary abbreviation of the conversation puts his position in a somewhat oversimplified focus. But the basic outlines are accurate.

We talked then of North Africa. I told him my very strong feeling that the present agitation was a serious mistake. He told me that during World War II he had been a Jewish Agency representative in Rumania; that he had tried to obtain money and authority to take the Jews out of that country. He had very little success—and now look what has happened! Israel, he said, does not really want any more Jews from Arab countries.

"I would give you ten Arab Jews," he said, "for one American Jew."

But Israel is convinced there will be difficult times in North Africa and that Jews will be hurt in the turmoil.

Therefore, Israel-Zionism is organizing this exodus.

I told him I found two errors in his analysis.

1. The Israel-Zionist partnership was trying to play God even to the extent of attempting to "save" American Jews and therefore his "practical" approach was not free of doctrinaire conviction that only in Israel could Jews be secure; that Rumania and North Africa were simply rationalizations of this basic dogmatism which was already evident in the United States and Latin America, and
2. In the long pull of history it was certainly possible to believe that if Jews acted like all other people in these revolutionary times, they would emerge, as integrated citizens, into whatever kinds of new societies may come.

It was here that we agreed we were on absolutely irreconcilable, philosophical grounds for he pointed out to me that such integration would "splinter" the "Jewish people." Then even if Jews survived—which he doubted—there would be no *national* solidarity. To this analysis I agreed, saying that this was precisely what the Council is about; that our quarrel was not with the State of Israel, but with its Messianic pretensions toward all Jews. I also said that these pretensions are now contrary to U. S. Government foreign policy. He accused us of persuading the Government to adopt such a policy and I am sure I was unsuccessful in my efforts to convince him that the emergence of such an American opinion about Zionism and Israel was inevitable because of the very nature of the American people.

The only place the conversation was less than candid was when he attempted to answer my charge that he and his Government were using American Zionists to put their ideas into operation in the lives of American Jews. He told me that the Council was unfair when we charged Israel

with things being done by Irving Miller, Abba Hillel Silver, Emanuel Neumann and others. I said that while Israel may have been able to maintain a technical, legal separation between herself and American Zionists, he should do me the favor of admitting my knowledge of American Zionism and conceding it did what the Israeli Government wanted. He denied this and tried to make a case which argued that American Zionists were American citizens who believed their Judaism and "Jewish peoplehood" were inseparable; that in order to maintain their *religion* these people had to sustain "the Jewish people"; that the State was now the chief instrumentality for accomplishing this purpose, and therefore the support of American Zionists for the State was a part of the *religion* of these American Jews.

Furthermore, he argued, these people were convinced this support of the State was in the best interests of the United States, hence their support for Israeli foreign policy objectives.

I conceded the possibility of this interpretation—purely for the sake of argument. I then asked him how he reconciled this "religious" approach with his own secularism. His answer was that *he* didn't but, as an Israeli, he had no authority to tell Americans they could not pursue this kind of Judaism. I then said that if this were so—and I agreed to the propriety he suggested—Israel might do better to repudiate the "religious" support of these American Zionists who, I told him, were giving Israel the coloration of anything but a normal state. I then asked him if he would see any objection to my saying just this to some of the people I hoped to see in Israel. His answer was that he saw no objection; that there are some Israelis who are not Zionists; but that basically he thought the Israeli people were convinced only they could save "the Jewish people".

So, we were right back where we had started. I impressed on him again that our opinions about a normal relationship of Jews and Judaism to the societies in which they exist were fundamentally different; that this was a legitimate, practical as well as ideological difference; that it ought to be debated as such and not cluttered up with false accusations charging we were opposed to the State or against its people—*as such;* that the battle was not new; that it had existed among Jews since the French and American Revolutions had fragmentized what he called "the Jewish people"; that the original battlegrounds had been Eastern Europe vs. the Western democracies; and that the scene had shifted so Israel now replaced the Eastern European protagonists of secularism; that it was the prerogative of Israel to do so; that it must bear any consequences of such a national orientation because it was unfairly involving Jews *living in the West* in a philosophy foreign to the countries of their citizenship.

He quarreled only with my charge of unfairness and resorted again to his unshakable conviction that he and the Israelis are wiser, more practical than we with our faith in Western liberalism and individual rights.

All of this is an accurate, even if abridged, report. The one reason I have for telling it to you at such length is my firm conviction that the differences between us are so fundamental no possible rationalizations or compromises exist. Our calm and reasonable discussion only proved, I believe, that we recognized no possible surrender on either side. The result was that neither of us was pressing the other and the conversation was, on both sides, a restrained, dispassionate exposition and refinement of totally

incompatible ideas. I do not know if I make the reasons for the objective nature of this discussion clear, or not. But I will say we left each other very cordially. I wish many of our own members could have participated. I am even at the point of wondering whether, at some future conference, we should not have a panel discussion between such an Israeli official and one of our own people.

The second experience was considerably less complicated and—I hasten to add—somewhat more satisfying. Last night there was a costume ball. Ruth and I were simply spectators. The lounge was crowded and a very nice young couple approached us and asked if they might share our table. I had not noticed them before, which must be put down entirely to my debit, not theirs. In the course of casual conversation we learned they were American Foreign Service people. I then asked him where he had served and he told me he had been in the service for nineteen years, the last five in the Planning Division for East European affairs. He had been one of the advisors at the Berlin Conference. I said I knew very few people in that part of the Department but I did know almost everybody in Near Eastern Affairs. It developed that his original training had been in Near Eastern Affairs. He knew Henry Byroade* and Parker Hart**. Then he asked me how I happened to know these people. This was approaching 2 A.M. and I suggested that we continue this morning. Then all of a sudden he said, "What did you say your name was?" (We had exchanged the usual, mumbled introductions when they first sat down.) I told him again who I was and his face just beamed.

"No wonder you know so much about Near Eastern Affairs," he said. Then he added, "The American Council for Judaism comes like a breath of fresh air to us in Washington, in a situation that is otherwise, everywhere contaminated." These were *precisely* his words. And I think you, Buddie, and the others will enjoy hearing this because it was all so casual and informal and so completely volunteered. Also, this man is no young, eager beaver. And people do not go to the Planning Division on the fifth floor of the building at 21st and Virginia Avenues for planning purposes unless they have plenty of grey matter.

At 3:30 A.M. we called it a day. I shall just add that he said practically everything we do is read and studied carefully; that no other approach to the whole Palestine problem makes sense; that Byroade's two speeches were cleared at very high levels and were influenced by our analyses of the situation.

And now, unaccustomed as I am to writing by hand and having failed completely to forget the Council at least between New York and Gibraltar, I think I shall sign off.

With the permission of the President, I shall now retire for my siesta. Best to Edith, Lil and both of you.

Elmer

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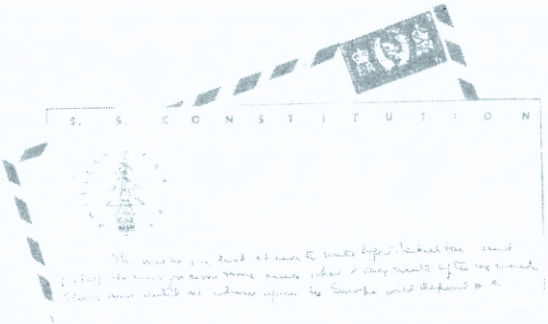
* Former Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs, now United States Ambassador to Egypt.

** Former Director, Near Eastern Affairs, United States Department of State, now assigned to United States Embassy in Cairo.



April 9, 1955

On Board S.S. Constitution

Dear Lessing and Buddie:

The most interesting experience I have had, after my conversation with Mr. Harman in New York and the very pleasant visit with our newly acquired acquaintance in the Foreign Service, had to do with the Seder service which the crew of the ship attempted to arrange on Wednesday night. Early Tuesday morning the purser called me and said he had learned I was a Rabbi. He asked me if I would consider conducting a Seder service on Wednesday, after we sailed from Gibraltar. I told him that there were a number of good reasons why I should probably not accept his invitation. However, we agreed that if there were enough people who wanted such a service and if there were no one else on board qualified, I would do so. On Wednesday afternoon, at 1 o'clock, I was informed that I was "it." We then went down to the tourist dining room and looked over the arrangements.

I picked up a copy of the *Hagadah* which they had on shipboard and Mr. Haley, the Chief Steward, told me a rather amusing story about having attempted to purchase *yarmulkes* in New York, knowing there would be a Seder service during this voyage. He told me he had made the arrangements through Dr. Israel Goldstein of New York and had paid for silk *yarmulkes*. But when he opened the package, he found that he had been shipped crepe paper ones. He was very embarrassed but I told him I thought it would not make any difference; and that as a matter of fact, probably not everyone would care about wearing a *yarmulke* anyway.

About 9:30 in the evening, after we left Gibraltar, we all filed down to the tourist dining room which had been given over completely for the services. Mr. Haley and Mr. Cooper, who is the Chief Purser, informed me that there were about 75 people.

Just as we were ready to begin, a very pleasant looking man came up and said that he had a 6½-year-old son on board who, he thought, could ask the Four Questions. I told him, of course, that I would be delighted. I began the service by saying there were a number of different *Hagadahs* and that no two Seder services were ever conducted alike. I said I was aware of the fact that there were many different kinds of Jews at the service; that I would try to maintain some kind of a common denominator; and that I hoped everybody would simply join in the spirit of the evening. Furthermore, I said, if I neglected to do some particular part of the service which someone thought important, I hoped any such person would feel

free to stand up and do that part of the service himself. Despite an atrocious English translation of the *Hagadah,* we went through the service quite well.

There were two interesting men sitting, one on either side of me, at the head table. After the service was over and while we were eating dinner, we began to talk about our various trips. I said we were going to the Middle East to visit all of the Arab States and Israel. One man said he hoped I would be able to do something with Colonel Nasser. I was not eager to engage in any of the specifics of the Arab-Israel problem and so I said there was a chance I might meet Colonel Nasser but that the whole problem was highly complicated and difficult. Then a woman sitting next to him said that everyone was against the State of Israel. I told her I thought she was wrong.

She said, "Well, at the last Security Council meetings in New York (part of which she had attended) everyone voted against Israel."

I tried to explain to her the difference between infiltrations and the fact that the Gaza incident had been demonstrated to be an armed attack in force; and I told her that the legal requirements of the Security Council undoubtedly compelled a unanimous condemnation. Then the man who had originally begun the conversation said "Yes, undoubtedly that was so. They had to vote against Israel. But everybody knew in his heart that Israel was not guilty."

Seated on my other side was a very nice gentleman who told me he had come originally from Vienna. He was also going to Israel. I asked him if he were going any other place and he said, "No, there is no place else for Jews to go when traveling, but to Israel."

When I asked him what he meant, he said, "Well, Jews cannot go to Germany or to France because of the anti-Semitism left over from the Hitler days. They are not very happy in Italy for the same reason. England is still an enemy of the Jewish people because of Palestine. Therefore, today if any Jew wants to travel and be happy, the only place to go is Israel."

I mention these two incidents because of the completely unrehearsed nature of the conversation and because I believe they reflect the insidious nature of propaganda upon average, innocent and simple people. If the reason for fighting anti-Semitism is because it creates undue and unfair insecurity for Jews, isn't it time for Jews to begin fighting this kind of poison served up to Jews by other Jews in the interests of Israeli politics around the world?

But probably the most pathetic incident in this whole evening occurred in connection with the little boy who asked the Four Questions. He spoke a very good Sephardic Hebrew. I then learned that he was an Israeli and had been in the United States for 2½ years. Interestingly enough, his parents told me later they were concerned that he had forgotten his Hebrew although he now spoke English quite well. After the service was over and he had asked the Four Questions very nicely, I said to him that it was customary to give little boys at a Seder some kind of a present. But since the whole service had been arranged so quickly and since we were on shipboard, there was not very much I could do by way of finding a present for him—so I gave him a dollar bill.

Both Ruth and I had a very nice conversation with his parents while we were walking out of the dining room and back to our own parts of the

ship. And, considering that the Seder had been a kind of makeshift and compromise affair, I thought everyone had been quite satisfied.

This morning, which is Friday, two days after the Seder, I found a note under my cabin door from the little boy's father. I am copying it here *verbatim* because I think it is a rather interesting footnote to this incident.

The note says: "Dear Dr. Berger, having learned of your association with the American Council for Judaism, we find ourselves unable to accept the dollar bill which you gave our son last night after the Seder service, and am enclosing it herewith. Thanking you for your attention, Sincerely, (I think the name is) Israel Batton."

As ever,
Elmer

April 14, 1955
CAIRO

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

We have been here now for two busy and interesting days. We flew from Rome on Tuesday. It was a beautiful trip–all down the coast-line of the Italian boot, then cutting across the Mediterranean. Unfortunately it was dark a good deal of the way but it was very exciting to come up over the lights of Alexandria and then, in a few minutes more—just at midnight—we put down here.

We spent yesterday seeing the sights—or some of them—before becoming involved in a round of appointments which promises to keep us fairly busy. That schedule started this morning and we have had a fascinating and moderately productive day about which, for the most part, I shall write you later. But at least one part of it may interest the Executive Committee on the 27th and so I hurry this off to you.

The last of a series of stimulating and informative conversations was arranged at 7:00 p.m. tonight with the Chief Rabbi of Egypt, Haim Nahoum. He is a magnificent old man of 83 who was formerly the Chief Rabbi of the Turkish Empire. He has been in Egypt for 30 years. He is now totally blind but as keen and alert as imaginable.

Because I am aware of the misinformation circulated at home about Jews in the Arab countries, I stress that the meeting was in the Chief Rabbi's home. No member of the Government was present. Only Ruth, the Rabbi's son (who acted as translator) and I met with this remarkable man. It is also amusing—in the light of the false distinction between Arab and Jew made by Zionist propaganda—that this man is called "Effendi" by many Egyptians, although since the Revolution the title is not used publicly anymore anywhere in Egypt, for anyone. You must understand however, that it is a title of respect.

I was therefore not completely surprised when we were taken into Rabbi Nahoum's apartment to see him sitting there with the traditional Arab fez. I wondered what would happen if he turned up at a United Jewish Appeal banquet in New York!

In any event, we talked of many things—over a period of two hours. But principally I asked him whether or not Jews here needed help for their institutions and whether or not they received any from the Joint Distribution Committee. You will all be enormously interested, I think, to learn that they do need help for schools and for a *non-sectarian* Jewish hospital and clinic, the latter serving monthly about 2,000 patients of *all* faiths. *But* they receive nothing from the Joint Distribution Committee *and would not* accept anything because *they* regard the Joint Distribution Committee as Zionist. The old man spoke movingly of Felix Warburg and Louis Marshall, whom he knew personally, and of the elder Morgenthau, who was Ambassador to Turkey. He expressed emphatic disillusionment at the deterioration from the days when he was in Turkey and received a million dollars for the Jews of the Ottoman Empire. He told me a striking story of how he had been approached in those days by a Zionist delegation led by Nahum Sokolow and asked to intercede with the Sultan to enable Zionists to buy land in Palestine. He said he would be glad to intercede if the land were for *individual* Jews who would become *Palestinian* citizens. But he would *not* intercede if the land were to be acquired for *national* purposes. The Zionists withdrew their request.

What a difference today if our American Jews had listened to such men who saw that early the conflict in national interest which Zionism would produce and who recognized it even then as a national movement *first* with humanitarian concerns always secondary! I think this is one of the most dramatic stories I have heard in my years of experience with this problem and I am only sorry that in a letter I cannot adequately convey the setting to all of you.

This story led me to tell him of our efforts to separate funds so that relief and nationalism would not be confused; and from that I went on to tell him of our new effort with a philanthropy of our own.

I am to meet the lay heads of the "Jewish community" here at a formal reception which we hope can be arranged next Tuesday. But the old man said he was sure help would be *welcomed*—greatly—provided it was clear *no Zionism* was involved. I told him that the charter of our new Fund made such a stipulation and he was immensely pleased.

Please understand—I have made no promises. In fact I do not know very much of the details. Also—unlike the way in which the Joint Distribution Committee now operates in many places—these Jews would take

no help without the full consent of the Egyptian Government—*and our own.* Imagine such integrity and dignity! One must come here perhaps to see the really great tradition of Judaism—*strictly traditional* in observance—and the dignity and pride it can give people who are experiencing the problems of a revolution together *with* their fellow citizens of other faiths. I shall have more to tell all of you about all this before I return. I shall make inquiries here of the Egyptian authorities and try to obtain more particulars from the laymen officers of the Jewish community.

You will also be interested to know that there is *no* indication of anti-Semitism here. *None at all.* This I have from both Jews and the highest officials of the Government. There is general insecurity for everyone—and for a number of highly complex reasons.

Egypt is a country in revolution and revolutions are as nasty a business today as they were in 1776 or 1848.

But it is a serious distortion of facts—and does damage to the United States *and* the Jews here—to raise the stupid cry of anti-Semitism about insecurities that affect Copt Christians and even some Moslems as well as Jews.

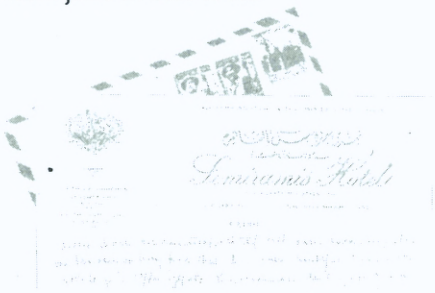
Rabbi Nahoum made a point of telling me that last week he was invited, along with Christian and Moslem community leaders, to participate in the ceremony officially raising the Egyptian flag for the first time over Suez. In the light of the importance of this ceremony in the history of modern Egypt I am sure you all realize there could hardly have been a more dramatic demonstration of the equality of all religions.

Rabbi Nahoum *Effendi*—if you please—is much interested in receiving our literature and being kept informed of our work and I am sending instructions to the office to put him on our mailing list.

I shall have more to write of the Jews here later—and of my talks with Government people—but this is all I have time for now.

Ruth joins in best to all.

Elmer



April 22, 1955
CAIRO

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

We have been so busy here that we shall probably not be able to spare the time to go to Luxor. I have had the greatest opportunities to see and talk to everyone and to see everything. It is still all too fresh to attempt any evaluations beyond the most superficial although there is surprising unanimity about most salient points. But I shall keep most of all this for my return.

Today I had one of the most depressing experiences I have had for a long time. A Jewish journalist called and asked to talk with me. He is a

fine man who works here for one of the news services. He is anti-Zionist and was—since long before the State of Israel.

There are 50,000 Jews in Egypt. They are mostly managing as well as can be expected in view of the *general* difficulties of the country. I stress the word "general." For there are economic problems, political problems and enormous social problems with which this Government is attempting to cope. Egypt is the most densely populated country in the world, I believe, in terms of the population (22,000,000) and the available, irrigated land. Everyone realizes the future of the country depends upon a successful land reform program *plus* industrialization.

I insert these general observations because a nation experiencing the passing of an old order and the birth of a new (and the new will come whether Nasser's Government engineers it or not) experiences stresses and strains. Jews have suffered. So have the Copts and—as the world knows—so have Moslems. The point is that *religion* is *not* the criterion for such suffering but rather those who—rightly or wrongly—are regarded as standing in the way of the Revolution. In this sense, this revolution is no different from any in history.

I am not here passing judgment. I am simply reciting facts and trying to say that what the United Jewish Appeal calls anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish is often something quite different if history is examined as a whole instead of through the needle's eye of narrow, Jewish interests.

On top of these *general* instabilities which affect *many* in Egypt, Jews do carry an additional burden. *But it is a burden imposed by other Jews* and it is not relieved by broadsides in the New York *Times* or United Jewish Appeal pamphlets which attempt to build up Israel by describing Arab countries in terms of contempt and derision. *For these Jews here are Arabs.* They speak Arabic. They dress like Arabs. They sell to Arabs. They buy from Arabs. Colonel Nasser is the Prime Minister of *their* country and I am struck by the realization of how shameful it is for American Jews to sit idly by—and even sometimes to applaud—while fund-raisers and Israeli Ambassadors and Israeli Cabinet members raise money by talking of these Arab countries as if they were sub-human.

There is no better dramatization of the Israeli *national* interest of Zionism and the United Jewish Appeal than the fact—brilliantly evident here—that Zionists and United Jewish Appeal propagandists *never* give a thought to the human, patriotic, traditional attachments of these 50,000 Jews to Egypt and its history—and now (I think) its promise.

This Jewish journalist, about whom I started to write this letter, has separated himself completely from the Jewish community—as have a number of others—because agents of the far-flung Zionist apparatus are able to exert pressure on the local leaders of the community. According to this man this pressure is brought through the centers of Jewish Agency activity in Rome and particularly in Paris. The leaders of the Cairo community are bankers, retailers and wholesalers. Egypt produces little that these people handle. They buy mostly in the European markets and the Jewish Agency operation is used to force these people to help Israel by bringing pressure upon them through suppliers in these European capitals. Since Oriental Jews—particularly—are accustomed to dealing with other Jews, the process is fairly simple.

At first I was a little surprised to learn this, but remembering how effectively economic and social sanctions imposed upon Jews by other Jews operate in New York, Chicago or Los Angeles, I suppose the surprise was occasioned only by learning that it can be parlayed Tel Aviv, to Paris, to Cairo.

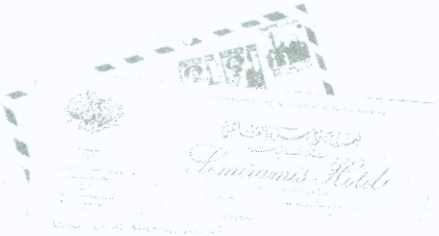
The Government knows this but does not take any action despite its attitude toward Israel. It is this kind of thing however, that complicates the possibilities for peace.

I have asked this man to write us a story about Egypt's Jews and he has promised to do so. But in any event, to the extent his story is true (and some American newspapermen here have confirmed it) one sees the ruthless and cynical activities of Zionism which is willing to play with the destiny of 50,000 Jews for a little money and in order to be able to take out a few hundred a year to Israel. This man blamed American Jews who, he says, are responsible for the creation of Israel and for supplying the funds which make this present, under-cover work possible. He has three children and is very discouraged about their future. He believes the present Government here *wants* peace with Israel but that it cannot negotiate a peace until Israel acknowledges at least the principles of the United Nations resolutions on refugees, boundaries and Jerusalem. This would enable the Egyptian Government to present any negotiations to its people as a diplomatic achievement. This is a fairly prevalent opinion and some of the things I have been doing here fit into the pattern. But there is great concern also that Israel really does not want peace because, with American money, it can sustain a state of half-war and half-peace better than any of the Arab states. Things are very bad at Gaza again and so we shall not be able to go there.

There are some complications in reaching the Gaza settlements from the available air-strip and enough people of authority have expressed concern for our safety so that we shall probably give up our plans to visit there.

I have seen and talked with Henry Byroade and shall see him again at least once more before we leave.

Ruth joins in sending best to all. Elmer



April 23, 1955
CAIRO

Dear Lessing and Buddie:

This will have to be a real "quickie." But I want to follow my letter of yesterday about the Jewish journalist, with the enclosed statement which he brought to me today, as per his promise during our conversation.

I think this—even with its not so perfect English—validates my letter of yesterday.

As ever,
Elmer

This statement was written for and handed to Elmer Berger by Elias Cohen (an Egyptian of Jewish faith), No. 1 Rue Gheit El Noubi, Charia El Geish, Cairo, Egypt. (Here reproduced *verbatim.*)

Subject: Report on the Jewish activities in Egypt's economic, commercial and cultural life during and after the Palestine campaign.

Dear Sir:

Seizing the opportunity of your visit to Egypt, I have the honour to submit the following report about the activities of the Egyptian Jewish Community in Egypt's economic, commercial, cultural and political life in Egypt, for your own information.

EGYPTIAN JEWS

Egyptian and Foreign Jews living in Egypt have always enjoyed in this country complete freedom, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and freedom of trade and commerce.

Jews in Egypt have, before and after the Palestine campaign, participated to a long extent in Egypt's economy and commerce, even during the hostilities which were taking place in Palestine, Egyptian Jews have exerted their full rights and obligations as all Egyptian citizens.

NO ANTI-SEMITISM NOR DISCRIMINATION

As a matter of fact, the Egyptian Jews have never felt anti-Semitism nor discrimination, as well as they were free to exercise their role in the commercial, economic and political fields.

JEWS REPRESENTED IN THE EGYPTIAN PARLIAMENT

Contrary to what happened in Iraq, where Jews, during and after the Palestinian campaign were discriminated, Egyptian Jews were enjoying their full rights, they were represented in the Egyptian Parliament, during the Palestinian campaign by two representatives, Mtre. Oslan Cattauoi, in the Senate and Mtre. Réné Cattaoui in the Chamber of Deputies.

UNDER THE REVOLUTIONARY REGIME

Under the Revolutionary Regime, after the 23rd July 1952, Jews in Egypt enjoyed more respect by the Revolutionary Government which seized every religious or social occasion to prove to the Egyptian Jews that there was no distinction between them and the Moslem and the Christian citizens, this was showed by the participation of the Egyptian Prime Minister in Jewish feasts by visiting the Synagogues.

JEWS REPRESENTED IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL COMMITTEE

When the Egyptian Revolutionary Government formed a special committee to draw up the draft of the new Egyptian Constitution, Jews were represented in this committee by the appointment of Mtre. Zaky Al Oraiby, the well known Egyptian lawyer, in the membership of the aforementioned committee.

JEWISH CULTURAL LIFE

It exists in Cairo and Alexandria and other important towns in Egypt. Several Jewish schools which are managed by Jewish personnel and where students of Jewish faith can learn Hebrew without the interference of any official authority.

The Jewish community in Egypt, in addition to Governmental aids afforded to these schools, afford great assistance to the orphans whose parents were unable to furnish them with the necessary commodities. In the Orphan's School in Cairo, students are given milk and breakfast in the morning as well as dinner and lunch. They are also supplied with the necessary clothing which is distributed amongst them on certain occasions.

EGYPTIAN JEWS IN EGYPT'S ECONOMIC LIFE

Despite the existing state of tension between the Arab states in general and Egypt in particular and Israel, Egyptian Jews are playing an important role in Egypt's economic and commercial life. They are investing huge capital in most of the Egyptian factories, companies, import and export firms and banks.

JEWISH SOCIAL LIFE

The Egyptian Jewish community, contrary to what took place in Iraq during and after the Palestinian campaign, is enjoying full liberty in managing their social and medical centres, which are also assisted by the Government. There exists in the Jewish street in Cairo a large social centre which affords help and assistance to the poor class regardless of their faith and religion, the funds of this centre is afforded by the Jewish community, donations of the rich and government assistance.

JEWISH IMMIGRATION TO ISRAEL

A certain number of the Jewish poor class, under the influence and promise of the Zionist propaganda, have immigrated from Egypt to Israel, the number of the immigrant Jews have considerably decreased since the beginning of the new Revolutionary regime, this decrease is mainly due to the following factors:

(a) *DISCRIMINATION OF ARAB JEWS IN ISRAEL*

Information has been received by the relatives of those who have immigrated to Israel to the effect that Arab Jews are discriminated in Israel, i.e., they are given the lowest work, such as bricklayers, labour drainage works and so on, even though they are well educated, whilst the European Jews are treated as if they were the masters and as if the Arab Jews were their slaves or servants. In view of this factor Egyptian Jewish immigration has considerably decreased within the last two years.

(b) *FREEDOM OF ACTION AND FREEDOM OF RELIGION*

Another important factor has resulted to the decrease of Jewish immigration to Israel, is that Egyptian Jews are feeling, under the New Revolutionary Regime, that they are considered as any other Muslim or Christian citizen and that they are enjoying the right of choosing the kind of work which suits them, whilst in Israel they will be obliged to work in whatever work which will be chosen by the authorities.

These two main factors are the cause of the decrease of Jewish immigration from Egypt to Israel.

ZIONIST PROPAGANDA IN EGYPT

However, despite these facts, the poor Egyptian Jewish class are still under the influence of the Zionist propaganda, immigrating to Israel, hoping

as this propaganda pictures to them, that they will enjoy richer life in Israel. These immigrants are helped in paying the expenses of their trip to France, from where they are re-embarked to Israel by two main sources. These are:

1. Tickets for the sea trip from Alexandria to Marseilles are being given to those immigrants free of charge by certain tourism company which, it is said, that it collects the price of these tickets from the Zionist Centre in France.
2. Donations from the rich people to the immigrants to help them in purchasing clothes and commodities needed for their trip.

It is a well known fact, that despite the fact that the Egyptian Government knows very well that those who apply for a passport will leave the country to Israel, it raises no obstacles on their way.

BIGGEST MISTAKE OF BIG POWERS AGAINST WORLD JEWRY

It is my opinion, as Egyptian citizen of Jewish faith, that the big powers have committed the biggest mistake against world Jewry by the creation of the Israeli State. They have isolated the Jews in most parts of the world and are regarded as being loyal to the new born state and that they are not faithful to the country in which they live and are considered as Israeli citizens who are living in other countries.

Whilst the big powers have strongly opposed and condemned the Nazis and Fascists for their discrimination of Jews in Germany and whilst these powers have spared no efforts in the settlement of the Jewish refugees from Germany they have, up to now, nothing done for the return or the compensation of the Arab Palestinian refugees who are, since seven years ago, wandering without refuge in the vast deserts. Despite this bitterness and tension we, Egyptian Jews, feel secure in our homeland, Egypt.

JEWISH ACTIVITY IN EGYPT

Apart from the above mentioned activities of Jews in Egypt it can be said that they are participating to a great extent in the different economic, commercial, social and cultural fields in the Egyptian life, but, it can also be said, that fearing the Zionist terrorism and threats they decline to participate in expressing their indignation to the Zionist policy, as they realize that an Egyptian Jew, namely, Mr. Sutton, proprietor of a Tourism Company, who refused to cooperate with the Zionists, following the Palestinian campaign, has been killed in Italy in 1950 by a Zionist terrorist for expressing his opposition to the Zionist policy. In view of this, I can say that Egyptian Jews refuse, by fear of the Zionist terrorism, to express their opinion as regards Zionism. Even the Grand Rabbi of Egypt, H. E. Haim Nahum, cannot express his real feelings and opinion about the Zionist policy, either in Israel or in foreign countries.

The above is a brief survey about the activities of the Egyptian Jews in Egypt. I hope that it will give you an idea of the situation of Jews in this country where they enjoy full freedom, equality and justice.

I remain, Dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

s/ELIAS COHEN

April 24, 1955
CAIRO

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

In a letter received today from Leonard Sussman, giving me a good report of work at the office, there was included a clipping from the New York *Times* of April 18. The clipping is enclosed and if Leonard decides to use this letter in *Council News,* the *Times* story will be reproduced so the point of the letter becomes clear.

MONDAY, APRIL 18, 1

ZIONISTS ASSAIL U.S. ON MID-EAST

Leaders Say Here Israel's Security Is Imperiled by Administration's Policy

Zionist leaders scored the United States Government's Middle East policy yesterday as endangering the security of Israel. They also called for a greater effort by American Zionists to combat "propaganda activities of the anti-Israel forces" in the United States.

As I read this Zionist release, here in Cairo, it suddenly occurred to me—in a new way—how much Zionism is the real enemy of Israel and how this extra-territorial nationalist movement provides one of the greatest obstacles to peace between Israel and her Arab neighbors.

Put yourselves in the position of any member of the United States Foreign Service; or even in my own position.

Our Foreign Service officers *are* interested in helping these countries find the conditions of a just and equitable settlement of problems outstanding between Israel and the Arab states. Such conditions are indispensable prerequisites to any lasting peace. In my own conversations with many private and public figures here in Egypt, I have reminded Egyptians that Mr. Dulles made a forceful distinction between Israel and Zionism. Americans here, at all informed on the complexity of this problem, are insisting that *an anti-Israel policy is no longer a valid position; that everyone must learn to live with the reality of an Israel that will become a normal state in the Levantine world.*

These people in the Arab world are apprehensive. They fear the expansionist threats of a *Zionist* Israel. They regard Gaza, for example, as a demonstration of military threat to the area. Some of them will say they must learn to live with *a* State of Israel, *but they do not see the State with which they are prepared to live as a part of a complex of Jews all over the world. This kind of an Israel they associate with colonialism*—and one has only to read the reports from Bandung here, as I have, to realize that *"colonialism" is the dirtiest word in the minds of these people.*

These people are *very* sensitive about opinion in the States, and they know that if they come finally to a peaceful co-existence with an Israel stripped of its expansionist potential, it will be because public opinion in the States reflects that definition of the problem and its solution.

Against this background, imagine reading—as I did today from *Zionist propagandists themselves*—that *anti*-Israel forces were increasing in the States. I know that *The New York Times* is on the desk of every important governmental official in this country, every morning. Who is performing a service in the interest of peace for this part of the world? Our American Foreign Service people—or perhaps myself a little—trying to explain a United States policy of anti-Zionism which is *not* anti-Israel and that peace must be evolved out of this theory; or the Zionist propagandists in America who

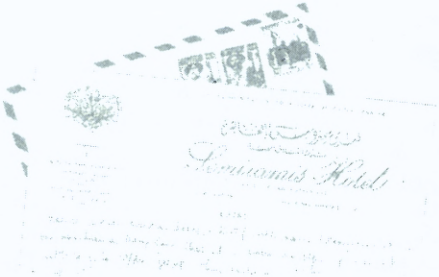
distort American policy and the position of the Council by equating anti-Zionism with an anti-Israel position?

If anything has been said or done in these two weeks of my stay here, more designed to encourage extreme opposition to Israel in this country than this *Zionist* distortion of American policy, I do not know what it is.

Zionist propaganda does not look much different out here. It just takes on added elements of unreality and designed intransigeance. Today, assuming they have received this same issue of the *Times* as quickly as I, there are some members of this country's government who think Mr. Byroade, or I—or any other American who may talk to them—is trying to mislead them. Those who want to believe that the United States can be persuaded to turn against Israel will find encouragement—not from Mr. Byroade or Mr. Dulles—but from Dr. Neumann and Dr. Goldmann and their proclivity for public misrepresentation of any position other than the "party line."

Cordially,

Elmer



April 26, 1955

CAIRO

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

We are preparing to leave Cairo the day after tomorrow—at 7 a.m. no less—so I shall take a few minutes to tell you of some things I have not had time to write before. My previous letters have concerned themselves largely with the position of the Jews here—because I thought the facts about them were really dramatic and also because the subject is closer to the specific interests of the Council than other observations I have been able to make.

But the bare facts about Egypt's Jews are not any more understandable without some general background of Egypt today, than a picture of America's 5,000,000 Jews would be understandable without a general understanding of the United States.

Fortunately, I have had the most generous cooperation in exploring the general political, economic and social conditions here. Since something of these factors is also related to our Council work insofar as we are involved with analyzing Zionist propaganda and also insofar as everyone is interested in *American* responsibilities in this part of the world, let me share with you—in a very brief way—some of the information I have picked up.

Unfortunately—for me—a number of the top Governmental people (including Nasser) are in Bandung. There was some hope they would return before our departure, but it is now certain they won't. While I would have liked the opportunity to meet Nasser, for my purposes, I suppose the official position of the Government has been accurately and even authoritatively given me by the people I have been able to see.

The most important of these is a young man by the name of Zechariah Moheddeine. He is one of the original officers involved in the Revolution. His present post is Minister of the Interior and, I think, he is also Chief of Military Intelligence.

Our conversation was very much worth while. Although I had expected it to be a rather formal meeting, more a matter of courtesy than of discussion, I was pleasantly surprised. I think we talked for nearly an hour and we discussed more than the weather and how I liked Egypt.

Naturally, one subject we exchanged ideas about was Israel and Zionism. Moheddeine was in the Egyptian garrison that had been trapped by Zionist forces at Faluja during the Palestine war. He may have been in command of those forces, but I am not sure. In any event, he was an officer of some considerable responsibility.

I began this part of our discussion by asking him directly what were the hopes—early or later—of a peace with Israel. It is interesting, psychologically, I think, that before he answered he told me of his association with the Faluja defeat. He added that this was a bitter pill for him to swallow and remains a painful memory.

I am no psychiatrist but it seemed to me then on the spot—and the reaction has been strengthened each time I have recalled this conversation—that it is a pretty healthy, mental process to be able to take such a bitter experience out of moth-balls, hold it up for anyone to see and calmly to admit the memory exists.

Despite this—and I think this is the important fact—he is today realistic about Israel. But this assertion was not given in some sweeping generality. He made two points which impressed me very much.

1. As Minister of Interior he is responsible for the vast, internal reforms which this Government has undertaken and the necessity for which—following the Farouk corruption—provided the real basis for the Revolution. While no one here claims Egypt is today a democracy, there is fairly general agreement that the Junta wants to restore parliamentary government as soon as possible. The time for that will probably be determined by the Junta's opinion of when elections can be held which will not return a majority or a stultifying minority of the old, corrupt regime. And that condition, in turn, will probably be determined by the speed with which things like land reform, educational facilities, sanitary conditions and other *internal* social improvements can be realized. One very important American here, whose name I cannot mention, expressed the hope that the present form of government would continue for some time because it *is* making progress and it needs to impress this progress on the masses before an election if there is not to be a restoration of the old regime; or a serious opposition from it. This job of persuading the masses is not so simple in a country where propaganda and the media for distributing it are somewhat less abundant than in other countries of the world.

In any event, Moheddeine, faced with this situation, earnestly and movingly deplored the Gaza attack. It is not only that Egyptians see it as an overt, military act designed to threaten their country. Nor is it a military defeat for Egypt. Moheddeine's feeling about it, in his own words, derives from the fact that now again, "The attention of the Government

and the people is taken from internal problems and our need for internal strength and improvement and diverted to the old problem of Palestine."

"If Israel really wanted peace," he said, "it would be more logical for her Government to leave us to build our own strength to the point where our people will be busy with the development of their own country and at that time a popular Government could persuade a confident people to begin to think of just and equitable bases for peace."

Meanwhile, he pointed out, the Israelis exploit an explosive situation in Gaza where there are refugees produced by the Palestine problem and turn the situation into a weapon which does nothing more than remind Egyptians that a threat still exists from an Israel which appears to be not undesirous of a war.

I asked him about the problem of infiltration and pointed out that Israel considered its continuation a threat to its peace and sovereignty. He smiled and gave the answer I knew myself; that while there was infiltration— and regardless of whether Egypt did all it could do to stop it—there was certainly no comparison between a man crossing the badly marked line for either justifiable or unjustifiable reasons, on the one hand, and an armed attack in force, on the other hand.

Besides, he told me that when efforts to stop infiltration became too severe, there were riots and uprisings against the Egyptian Government, as had just happened. While some infiltration is clearly petty thievery and therefore unjustifiable, much of it arises because these people—about 225,000 plus 100,000 original inhabitants of Gaza crowded into a strip of land about 5 miles wide and 30 miles long—see their former homes and lands just over an almost imaginary line while they, themselves, have neither land nor work of any other kind.

2. Moheddeine's second reason for wanting to avoid a war with Israel has to do with the British and Suez. The successful negotiation resulting in the evacuation of the British from Suez is regarded here as the greatest diplomatic victory of the Revolution and as the final imprimatur of Egyptian independence. According to Moheddeine, if a serious war developed between Israel and Egypt, a reason might be found for the British to return. I am convinced that if this were to happen it would be regarded more seriously here—now—than the defeat in the Palestine war was regarded in 1948.

In any event, these explanations make sense to me. I do *not* say these people are prepared to make a peace. But after about two weeks and a half, naturally talking of this problem more than of any other single one, I am also absolutely convinced that a "second round" is sheer Zionist propaganda and United Jewish Appeal fund-raising talk.

The conditions for peace—as over against an actual danger of war—are not easy. There is everywhere fear of Israeli expansion. Aggressions like Gaza do nothing to remove the fear. These people know more of Zionist and Israeli affairs than most American Jews. Moheddeine reminded me of Israeli Major-General Dayan's article (Dayan is *very* close to Ben Gurion) in *Foreign Affairs* last winter claiming that Israel's present security position was untenable.

Moheddeine asked me what else that could mean but a plan or hope to widen the State of Israel's territory—naturally at the expense of Jordan—

in the area where Dayan complains the State is an "average of twelve miles wide."

As the conversation drew to a close, Moheddeine offered what I think is one of the most concise and penetrating analyses of Zionism—and Arab concern about it—that I have ever seen or heard. In a few sentences, but with sharp pertinence to the issue of peace, he posed the question of whether Israel is to remain a Zionist State; or is to fit itself in—peacefully—as an integral state in the Middle East.

Here is approximately what he said to me.

"There have always been three elements in any resolution of the Palestine question and two of them have always been subsidiary to the third. There has always been the question of immigration. How many Jews could the land absorb without displacing the Arabs? There has always been the question of sale of lands. How could this sale be controlled so that Arabs would not be landless and without means of livelihood?

"These two questions however, have always been subsidiary to the basic question of with whom do we negotiate these issues. With the Jews of Palestine? During the Mandate, with England? Or do we have to negotiate with world Zionism?

"It has been demonstrated in the past that any agreement made about the two subsidiary questions with either the Jews of Palestine or the Mandatory power was always subject to change by reason of the power of world Zionism in foreign capitals.

"We were told—at times—that the Jewish Agency represented the Jews of Palestine. Then we would be told it represented world Jewry. We never had anything against the Jews *in* Palestine. But we could not tolerate a Palestine which belonged to *all* of the Jews of the world who would be given rights at the expense of the Arabs of Palestine.

"So now, there may be a basis for peace with the people *in* Israel. But there is no peace possible with Israel if we are expected to negotiate the rights *in Israel* of the Jews everywhere in the world.

"Today we know that the questions of land and immigration have been changed into the problems of boundaries and a million Arab refugees. These are negotiable. But we will not again negotiate either with a Government in Israel or with one of the Western nations until we are firmly and convincingly assured neither the negotiations themselves nor their possible results will be influenced by some branch of world Zionism. Zionism is an absentee party with only illegitimate interests in Palestine."

I think this pretty well covers my talk with probably the most important official in Egypt not now at Bandung. I had hoped to finish this by telling you something of the economic and social accomplishments we have seen, of my talk with Mr. Salvator Cicurel whose niece is married to Mendes-France and who is a distinguished leader of the Jewish community and also of a conversation with the head of the Palestine Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But Ruth and I have a date for lunch and so I shall mail this and try to write again this afternoon or—if that is impossible—from Baghdad where we arrive Thursday.

As ever,

Elmer

Later, April 26, 1955
CAIRO

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

I think I may be able to finish the letter I started this morning before a very good lunch and a lot of pleasant, warm sun and good country-club atmosphere at the Gezira Club, which is on an island in the Nile and a lovely place with about three swimming pools, a polo field, tennis courts, a golf-course and just a lot of good sitting space.

Perhaps the first thing I should try to write is a summary of my talk with Mr. Cicurel because it remains as a piece of unfinished business in connection with my earlier reports to you about the Jews in this country. I shall try not to repeat things I remember having written but since I have no copies of my letters, I cannot be sure and you will have to forgive an occasional reference to something I may already have told you.

Mr. Cicurel met us in the office of his department store, which is the largest in Egypt, well stocked, in a beautiful, modern building. With him were Rabbi Nahoum and the vice-President of the store who is also an important leader in the Jewish community.

Everywhere here when you have an appointment, the first order of business is the drinking of Turkish coffee—and Mr. Cicurel's reception was no different. There is never any serious talk until this rite is completed.

I began the conversation—at Mr. Cicurel's request—by telling him about the Council and about my pleasant surprise at having heard earlier from Rabbi Nahoum of the significant number of Jews in Egypt and of their generally satisfactory security. I explained to him that in the hurly-burly of Zionist propaganda and fund-raising for Israel, even those of us who tried to keep fairly well-informed had been led into an almost total blackout about Jews in the Arab States; and that about all we ever heard were Zionist and Israeli charges of "pogroms" and "anti-Semitism."

Cicurel confirmed Rabbi Nahoum's earlier report that these stories were unfounded. Some sense of uneasiness and insecurity exists but it comes from the general, social upheavals of the country and is not to be construed as discrimination against Jews. There is, as we all know, great poverty among many Jews. But this is true also of many Egyptians of other faiths and recognition of its existence and of the necessity for removing it is one of the prime motivations of the Revolution. Other than this, Cicurel blames Zionist agents for exploiting these general and basic situations. The Jewish community here—and even the Government to a smaller degree—knows of these agitations. The Jews are disturbed by them and the Government does little about them unless they become involved with national security so that, by and large, no great obstacles are placed in the way of Zionist agents. Despite the efforts of such agents, a negligible number of Jews have left—or are leaving. The result of this agitation therefore, is mostly to create tensions and to provide the Government with suspicions which would not otherwise obtain.

Cicurel believes that no notable number of Egyptian Jews are even remotely interested in emigration to Israel. Those who, in the past, wanted to go have been able to do so by going through European ports and the Government has generally known of these, also.

But perhaps Cicurel's most convincing argument was put in terms of his personal and business experience. Their store was burned during the rioting in January 1952—before the Revolution. He and his associates were faced with a decision. Should they rebuild in Cairo? Or should they take the position that there was no hopeful future for Egyptian Jews?

"This store, which we regard as one of the most beautiful commercial structures in Egypt, is our answer to what we believe to be our future," he said.

We discussed, in general terms, the possibility of assistance to some of the Jewish institutions here when our Philanthropic Fund is operating properly. Cicurel expressed considerable interest in such cooperation—provided the Egyptian Government would agree. The hospital supported by the Jewish community—which also serves Moslems and Christians who live near the Jewish quarter—is run with an annual deficit of around $30,000. The Jewish leaders would like to increase their services—particularly on a non-sectarian basis.

The other area of possible cooperation would be the Jewish educational system where there are approximately 2,000 children. I stressed the fact that we could not help financially unless we were sure the schools did not teach "Jewish" nationalism.

Here, Rabbi Nahoum interrupted to say with kindly humor, "Don't worry about that. We have been aware of the evils of political Zionism before you in America ever thought of it." I am sure he is right!

But this whole question of philanthropic assistance is something that will have to be investigated carefully—not alone with these people but also with the proper authorities in the Egyptian Government and also our own Government. Except to report the possibility I shall not here go further into details.

I have informally talked of the possibility of such cooperation between us and these Jews of Egypt with a few officials of the Government and on the basis of such informal and general questioning have been told that there appears to be no reason why we should not proceed.

I shall take the time to tell you one other interesting part of our visit to Cicurel's office. By advance arrangement, after we had had a good long talk with him alone, a representative of the Government came down. He is a brilliant young lawyer, turned press attaché for Colonel Nasser and has been available to us whenever we wanted him. His name is Mohamed Omar.

He joined this meeting in Cicurel's office to discuss the possibility of the reception which the Jewish community had said it was interested in giving for Ruth and me. The reason for the Government's interest was obvious and Mohamed Omar made no bones about it. If the reception were given, he would undertake to have outstanding officials of the Government attend to indicate to the Jews that the Government continued to be interested in their welfare; and to dramatize the Government's policy of equality for Jews in Egypt's social life. These people are aware of the

fact that they are being slandered as anti-Semites and I liked the bold and direct way in which Omar admitted his professional interest in a project which might be another public demonstration to the contrary.

The interesting part of the discussion came when Omar and Cicurel discussed the place for the reception. Cicurel wanted it in one of the properties of the Jewish community. Omar wanted it at the Semiramis Hotel and it was Omar's argumentation which fascinated me.

In the first place, he made it very clear that he would not insist but he politely asked Cicurel to weigh the Government's logic. Omar's reason was that while each of the religious communities was to feel free to conduct its religious life as it wanted, the Government would like to encourage the separation of social functions and attitudes from religious practices. A public reception for Ruth and me—in a public place attended by members of the Government—would dramatize this objective.

The exchange between Omar and Cicurel was pleasant and courteous. It was obvious that Cicurel was reluctant to follow this advice, because of long established patterns in these countries where religious communities are palpable and quasi-legal entities reaching into areas of life beyond what we in the West call religion.

I was, naturally, in a difficult spot and kept quiet until both Cicurel and Omar asked if we had a preference. I said that what I was about to say did not indicate a personal preference, since we did not care where the reception would be held. But on principle I had to agree with Omar since what he had said was more in keeping with our American tradition and so, naturally, I believed it to be sound and valid and a condition I would some day like to see established in Egypt.

The point of the story is simply to emphasize some of the progressive thinking going on in these countries. As a matter of actual practice, the whole plan for the reception had to be abandoned because we could not find a date to accommodate everyone; and because Ruth and I had preempted about the only free evening we had for a party we want to give at the hotel for everyone who has been so helpful and hospitable to us. We have invited the leading Jews and all the Government officials we have met, so perhaps something of the same purpose will be served.

And now, two brief comments and I think I shall have sent you my general impressions from this first stop of ours in the Arab world.

Quite as surprising as the revelations I have heard about the Jews here are my impressions of the growing dynamism of this country and its determination to meet its enormous social and economic problems. This subject in itself would be material for a book. I can do no more than suggest what is taking place.

The most important fact is not what has been finished, but rather the extreme (almost the hyper-) sensitivity of these leaders to the urgent necessity for reforms and improvement. This consciousness of a lag in their history certainly bears no resemblance to Zionist propaganda about "feudalism" and "ruling classes unconcerned with the masses of population."

But the dynamics are not only "good resolves of the heart." We drove, one day, about three hours into the desert to see a vast land reclamation and irrigation project called "Liberation Province." This is a gigantic undertaking, where eventually 2,000,000 people will be settled in good houses,

with irrigated land stocked with prize cattle and poultry and raising choice fruits and other produce.

In the broiling sun, I saw these Arabs working with some of the biggest construction machinery I have ever seen in my life. I saw poultry hatcheries which are as scientifically controlled and as clean and handsome as I have ever seen at a county fair—and despite my New York residence I have been to county fairs. There were Strasbourg geese brought in for experimental purposes in the hope that Egypt might be able to produce some of that wonderful paté which I shall certainly consume when we hit Paris. There are small, experimental gardens where they are trying to find out what crops will flourish in the soil—and which won't. At present, watermelons are being watched. There is prize cattle from Holland and they have already begun to breed their own from this selected stock.

The amazing aspect of all this—to me—is that Egypt is managing it all herself. There are no "philanthropic" campaigns in any other countries to finance this immense development.

On the industrial side, I saw a tremendous textile plant at a city called Mehallah. While much of what I saw was technically beyond me, it is an excellently equipped plant employing 15,000 people and managed by one of the most dynamic men I have ever met. The need in Egypt is for industrialization because the country cannot absorb its population in agriculture, even with land reform and such projects as Liberation Province. If the Mehallah mills are an example of what is possible here, given power and water (which go together), the future should be hopeful.

Finally we saw, in a small village about four hours from Cairo, what is known as a "social center." This is a small building where there is a trained, social service worker who serves—in this particular situation—about 10 villages. Here, the *fellahin* are taught simple improvements in farming and encouraged to advance their education. From this "social center" small libraries are stocked and supervised in the 10 villages. There is a "Council" of the elders of these villages and a kind of democratic procedure for making decisions. There is a small clinic to treat various diseases and charts and pictures designed to encourage greater attention to hygienic conditions generally.

You should see with what pride the director showed us the chart indicating the steady increase in the number of mothers who gained confidence in the center clinic and came there to have their babies born, rather than relying on the old system of almost primitive treatment, mid-wives and little, if any, precaution against disease.

Progress is difficult here—not because of conniving, selfish "overlords" —but because ancient practices deeply imbedded in the folkways of people surrender slowly to modern ideas and to the patience and dedication of men like this social service worker. His great, personal pride in each advance is a source of encouragement for those looking for hopefulness in this part of the world. There are several hundreds (I cannot remember the exact number) of these centers throughout the country. They represent a kind of bridge between the old and the new. Here can be found some of the real heroes of this Revolution which has captured the minds of almost everyone you meet—although I hasten to add that many of these centers existed before the Revolution of 1952.

The only other event of probable interest to you is my long and detailed talk with a man by the name of Joseph Shadid, Chief of the Palestine Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In this conversation I was impressed again with the precise and accurate knowledge these people have of the Palestine problem—throughout its history. There are several, rather important conclusions in which you may be interested. They are not *my* conclusions—although they reflect opinions I have long held. But they may be of value to you as this man's opinions, which I imagine are generally shared in this Government.

1. There is no danger of any immediate war with Israel—from *this side.*

2. While Shadid did not indicate any immediate interest in a peace, the reasons have to do with the history of the problem and not with the *de facto* existence of Israel which is understood here.

3. What is feared is expansion and the power that Zionism gives the State of Israel. The degree to which the West has lost the confidence of these people in the Palestine matter is tragic. When I said that the United States had pledged itself to the Tri-Partite guarantees of boundaries and armistice lines, Shadid only smiled and asked me if I remembered that England had given firm pledges to the Arabs in 1939.

4. I asked him if he could tell me anything at all of what Egypt might want as a basis for peace. He listed the usual factors of settlement of the refugee problem, boundaries and Jerusalem.

   But then he added that no peace could be made as long as the Arabs were convinced it had been motivated by Zionist pressures in London or Washington; that Israel's *attitude* must be noticeably changed; and that probably any peace would require some assurances the Arab world would have to treat *only* with Israel and *not* with a Zionist empire; and because of this, some firm and specific *international* guarantees would be required. He said he thought the Israelis knew all this and that one of the reasons they were being uncooperative with the United Nations Truce Supervision machinery was because they wanted to eliminate "international controls" of the situation and try to deal, individually, with the various Arab states in a direct manner.

These points fairly well summarize the conversation. If there is one lesson in it for us, it is that there can be no peace at all with a Zionist Israel. I believe the responsible Arabs have made their last concession to a *Palestine* situation which is only *one* aspect of a world movement of "Jewish" nationalism. If this evaluation is correct—and I shall withhold judgment until I talk to responsible people in other countries—then anti-Zionism, oddly enough, is one of Israel's best friends . . . *if* (and it is a big *if*) Israel wants peace.

This, I think, is enough for now. I hope our visits elsewhere are as pleasant and informative as these weeks here have been.

I shall try to write as I find time and things I think will be of interest.

Ruth joins in sending best to all.

Cordially,

Elmer

May 3, 1955

BAGHDAD

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

We reached here Thursday after about a seven-hour flight from Cairo with a stopover for lunch at the Damascus airport. The trip was really beautiful. You fly well out over the Mediterranean (we were in an Iraqi Airlines plane) because of the Israeli situation. Then, around Sidon and Tyre on the Lebanese coast you cut back in and over the Lebanese plains and mountains to Damascus. As you turn in over the coast, you can see the Israeli coastline as well.

Yesterday we were among eight hundred invited guests to see the ceremony transferring the great air base at Habanniyah from British to Iraqi control.

To Ruth go all the diplomatic awards for the trip because she kidded a number of our Iraqi friends into allowing her to go along. I think she was the only female to attend from Baghdad and we flew over in a special plane with a good number of the Cabinet officials.

This saved us something like seventy-five miles of driving over hot and not-so-good desert roads, which are little more than tracks.

The ceremony was an impressive performance—and one full of implications for our day in history. Although I believe colonialism is a thing of the past and that all of these countries are in the process of enormous economic and social development, it is something else again to stand and see a remote outpost of *our* way of life (for the base is a magnificent installation) a few hundred miles from the Soviet border, turned over to a small nation. On a wild—and probably exaggerated—guess I would say there are perhaps not many more men in the whole Iraqi army than the number of British who at peak times may have operated the base. Yet the British marched off with great dignity and all the pomp and ceremony they always employ on formal occasions, including the Ambassador, who stood in the very hot sun with a top hat and morning coat to express the sentiments of Her Britannic Majesty's Government. Some of the men wept as the Union Jack was pulled down, but the next moment they cheered as the Iraqi flag was raised. The King and his Foreign Minister were also on hand. Both spoke briefly—and well.

The Iraqis are proud of their new association with the West.

The British are seen everywhere in the economic life of the country and although the Iraqis know a military crisis would bring them back militarily, there is a world of difference between cooperation as equal partners and the former situation in which the British held all the cards. Now, an Iraq that feels free and independent of colonial controls is not afraid to invite all manner of technical assistants. There is some bad feeling between Egypt and Iraq over the pact with Turkey and the big squeeze is on in Syria.

I could not but remember the history of this area in which the power has always centered about its two great rivers—the Euphrates and the Nile. Palestine's greatness was always in the realm of ideas. The only time it ever amounted to anything as a political power was on those occasions when ancient Babylon or Assyria or Egypt or all of them were in decline. Will history repeat itself? It will be fascinating to watch.

On leaving the field we saw the Iraqi "air force" about which our Zionist co-religionists do so much screaming. It would be sad if Cyprus were not a mere two hours away by jet fighter speed. The Iraqi force consists of a few very dated Vampire jets, painted a bright green and black, which are the national colors. One has only to look at what the British left at the base to see—even without technical military knowledge—that its only value is defensive. I doubt that these planes could fly the 500 miles or so to Israel—and return—without refueling, even if there were intention to attack.

Also, one reason why the Arab States lost the Palestine war is apparent here and also why a "second round" is highly unlikely. Israel had short lines of communication. This country, for example, which is perhaps the strongest in a military way today, has no internal lines of communication and is separated from Israel by a good 500 miles of trackless desert.

The air base itself is a tough three-hour ride over a "desert track"—not a road.

This afternoon we go to Babylon which, American Jews would be interested to know, is regarded as a center of "Jewish shrines"—and is so operated by the Iraqi Government. One Government official said to me he did not understand why the Jews of the world seemed to neglect the fact that perhaps the greatest contribution to Jewish philosophy came from Babylon. The situation here with regard to Jews is improving constantly. I had an occasion to tell this official that Iraq should promote these holy places as a part of its tourist program and should relax the difficulties now imposed upon Jews seeking visas. He said he thought this might happen in the not-too-distant future. I am convinced that a peace formula is possible if only the Israelis would relax and stop trying to force it by the kind of thing still going on at Gaza. The last thing these countries will agree to is a further surrender to Zionist force. But even Government people say there is the possibility of a peace with a "generous" Israel.

This country today reminds me of whatever our own West must have been like a century ago. It is lusty, bustling and intensely concerned with its internal development. It is spending about $150,000,000 a year of its oil royalties on economic and social development. There is a new school on almost every corner and a shortage of teachers and technicians. Practically the whole city of Baghdad is being rebuilt. There are new houses

everywhere. Many of them are of the "low-cost" variety. There is a serious shortage of skilled labor but the people handling the development funds are trying to prevent the tribesmen and farmers from flocking into the cities and creating problems of congestion. With this in mind, the greatest development is taking place in the rural areas where, unfortunately, we shall not have the time to travel.

One officer of the Development Board put it to me quite clearly. "We have the money, the people and the water," he said, "and we think we are now well along the road to building a modern state."

Interestingly enough, the Government is putting its own comfort last and its own offices are still housed in ancient buildings left over from the Turkish occupation.

We leave Friday for Beirut.

Best to all from Ruth and me,

Elmer

May 8, 1955
BEIRUT

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

We are sitting on the veranda of this beautiful hotel in this beautiful city—under a cloudless peaceful sky—with the Mediterranean almost lapping at our feet. These are the first couple of hours we have had to ourselves, except for sleeping or dressing, since we reached Cairo on April 12.

Flying over here from Baghdad the day before yesterday, I was forcefully impressed again with the spurious character of Zionist propaganda in the United States—particularly in recent months—about American military assistance to Iraq. We flew nearly five hours, non-stop, in a DC-3. For practically the entire distance there is nothing but limitless stretches of sand and the merciless sun beating down on a trackless desert. The only exception is the pipeline which brings the oil from Iraq, through Syria, to the shores of the Mediterranean.

I am no military expert, but simple logic answers the Zionist charge that any arms given Iraq by the U. S. would be of very much practical value for an attack on Israel—even if the Iraqis lived and breathed only to make such an attack, which they do not.

Moreover, the usual Israel-Zionist lamentation that the Arabs have all the land here and they should not begrudge the 8,000 square miles of Israel, is a specious argument in the face of the austere character of most of this area. For until there are new, revolutionary methods of cultivation or fantastic sums of money—or both—one may as well say Canada should not object if the United States claimed everything south of Hudson Bay because there is a whale of a lot more land in the north of the continent.

I do not mean the analogy to be strictly applied, nor interpreted as a reason for destroying Israel. I use it only because these impressions of the severity of much of this territory are vivid in my mind; and because for Israel and Zionists to use this propaganda line is to evade the real issues out here by relying upon their propaganda ability to create misleading impressions in public opinion back home.

But it is not this I have decided to write about today. All of the perfectly magnificent, natural beauty and peace which we are enjoying here on the balcony of our hotel room, is in the most anguished contrast with my thoughts and emotions. Since last I wrote you from Baghdad I have been simply enervated with despair and frustration. And perhaps I had better begin there and try to tell the story simply and chronologically.

On Sunday, May 1—which as you know is a working day in the Moslem lands since Friday is their day of rest—I had a long and frank discussion with a man by the name of Mumtaz Al-Umari, who is the Director General of the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior. I had known this man's brother well in New York during a period when he was serving as a member of the Iraqi United Nations delegation and also completing some studies. So my relations with Umari, the Government official, were fairly easy and informal.

The Ministry of the Interior has charge of problems which relate particularly to Jews—both at present and which are also left over from the Palestine war.

I did not write you of this conversation in detail—at the time—by design. For all of the friendliness and informal tone of the conversation it was still official and while I do not suggest—in fact because of specific answers to specific questions I was sure—that there was no conscious misrepresentation, I wanted to discuss the question of the conditions of Jews here with someone less official before coming to any conclusions.

On Thursday, May 5, I saw the Chief Rabbi and three acknowledged leaders of the Jewish community in Baghdad. It is not now necessary for me to detail my talk with Umari, for the story I heard in the office of the Chief Rabbi supports—in every major consideration—the account of the Government official. I shall perhaps, in places in the following report, indicate any differences in the two stories; or add anything of significance which Umari told me, but which was not mentioned in my talk with the Baghdadi Jews.

I must say, first of all, that Umari himself suggested I talk to the Rabbi and the Jewish leaders.

Umari did not even want to arrange the appointment because he wanted to impress upon me that the talk with these Jews was to be free and absolutely without any official constraints. I therefore made the arrangements myself through a very competent Semitic scholar—Jawad Ali—(a

Moslem) whom I had met in New York a year or so ago. Because of Ali's specialization in Semitics, he knew the Jews, and particularly the Chief Rabbi, intimately. I stress my firm conviction that the Government did not know when or where I would meet these people and offered no indication of any concern as to who would be in the group.

On Thursday morning, we went to the Chief Rabbi's office. It is in one of the oldest sections of Baghdad. We wound our way through the narrow bazaars, amid a crush of humans, merchandise and the ubiquitous donkeys. Down a long, dark corridor we followed the trail until we suddenly turned a corner on a beautiful garden and court. How these islands of green and quiet have survived, surrounded by the dust and bustle of Oriental bazaars, no one can explain. But you are constantly surprised by them. We went up a broad, spacious stairway, accompanied by an official Government guard and servant provided for the Chief Rabbi, as for every prominent official or semi-official of the State. And finally we were led into a bright, cheerful office where there sat three young men and as imposing and dignified a figure as I have ever seen. The latter, of course, was the Rabbi, a member of the distinguished and historically famous Sassoon family. His full name is Chief Rabbi Sassoon Kheddoury. The Kheddoury family is one of Iraq's oldest and most distinguished but not quite as well known in the West as the Sassoons. I have a photograph of him which (I hope) will surpass anything I could write now by way of description.

The Rabbi wears a distinctive garb—of his own choosing—and a turban (as do many effendis or pashas and all religious leaders) which is also different from the usual type or from those worn by the Moslems or Christians. This struck me immediately and—in my usual inability to be indirect—I asked if this costume were a mark of segregation. He answered (in Arabic which was translated) that on the contrary, this was a dress he had designed himself and wore proudly; and when he walked on the streets of Baghdad or drove in his car it was a source of respect accorded to him as to all religious leaders of the country.

We were immediately offered the inescapable orange pop (which is awful) and Turkish coffee which we both like. The guard, by the way, disappeared the moment the formalities of meeting were ended.

The three men were business people. One—a Mr. Abad—is an appliance dealer. The other two were related by marriage and together owned the entire concession for most General Motors products for practically all of Iraq, except Basra.

The conversation began rather formally with the usual, expansive and extravagant expressions from the local people of how grateful they were for the visit. I find I run out of adjectives for this part of every Oriental meeting, while the Arabs (and these Jews are Arabs) go on and on. It is a built-in part of every meeting—as natural to an Oriental as our brief, "Glad to meet you!" It all grows a little silly when a translator is interposed. But you learn to wait it out if you really have anything to talk about.

It usually ends with the last swallow of the coffee—and so it did this time. I then told the Rabbi and the three laymen as much as I could about our work, in the simplest language I could find. They all knew of the Council in a general way and my briefing was largely a matter of telling them what we did to make our principles a practical reality in American life.

When I had finished the Rabbi took over first. He told me that what we were doing in the States was only what Iraqi Jews had believed for thousands of years. There is enormous pride in their heritage as Jews for, scientific Biblical research to the contrary, they regard their origins in Iraq to be 4,000 years old—dating from Abraham. Naturally, they regard the Babylonian Exile in 586 B. C. as a great landmark in Judaism's history and they are immensely proud of the notable achievements of those "exiles."

There is something palpably exciting in this, for you see words you have read in history books, living and breathing and talking in the same room with you. And these people allow this tradition to fall on their shoulders with majesty and dignity.

Here, by the way, I am reminded of one of those historical excursions which took place during my conversation with Umari. As we were talking of the present he took pains at one point to emphasize that there had never been any serious discrimination by Moslems against Jews.

"You know," he said, "many of us consider the Jews to be original inhabitants of this country. We believe, according to the Koran, they are descendants of Abraham and that goes back nearly 4,000 years. Compared to them therefore, we Moslems are interlopers because we have been here only about 1,500 years."

I should add, in order to put it in its proper perspective, that he said this humorously. But just because he did, rather than pontificate about it, I counted it one of those casual, little asides which sometimes mean more than a measured sentence.

After recalling this history, the Rabbi said that the position of Jews in Iraq had always been the same as that of the Council. Only there is a difference which I may find it difficult to communicate to you. The Jews—and the Moslems—in Iraq just took for granted that Judaism is a religion and Iraqi Jews Iraqis. The Palestine problem was remote and there was no question about the Jews of Iraq following the Arab position. Neither the Jews nor the Government ever thought otherwise. In all the political debates over Palestine before 1948, there had never been a suggestion from anyone that Iraqi Jews supported the political aspirations of the Zionists. And if there were any surprise at what I had told them about the Council it was evoked at the realization that in the United States any debate was needed on the question of whether Judaism was a religion or a nationality; and whether the United States position on Palestine should be challenged on a "Jewish" basis.

This explanation by the Rabbi offered me the opening to ask why; in the light of these traditions and history, there had been such an exodus in 1950-1951; and, to make sure I was not misunderstood, I asked whether or not there had been outside interference.

Here is the story, substantially the same as the Director General of the Ministry of the Interior had given it to me and it is the reason why, for these three days, I have been sick at heart and deeply upset.

When the Palestine war ended in 1948, there was great unrest in Iraq. This was natural in a country that had lost in a war.

There were wholesale discharges of Jews from Government positions—particularly where international contacts of one kind or another were involved; Post Office, Telegraph and Finance. Umari, by the way, had told

me this without my asking. In fact, he had admitted that "with hindsight it was probably a mistake—but an understandable one in view of the serious emotional stress of the country."

Not alone was it a mistake because of its effect on public opinion, but for months and months, it was apparent that it had been a mistake in terms of the operation of the Government and the country's economy. The best accountants for example had been Jews, and suddenly a vacuum existed where before there had been good service. Jews also were the most versatile linguists in the country—as a group. And their elimination created difficulties in handling all kinds of Governmental and commercial transactions. Furthermore, there had been no secrecy or conspiracy about the move. It had been reported in the Iraqi press and again, with hindsight, Umari admitted this probably had been a mistake.

Early in 1949, Shafiq Adas, a wealthy Jew from Basra, was executed for "treason." Umari had told me the trial was public and conducted with due process of law. Adas had been accused and convicted of "trading with the enemy" for smuggling materials out of Iraq to Israel during the Palestine war. The Rabbi and Jewish leaders were somewhat more circumspect in discussing the Adas affair although they entered no substantial disagreement. They believed the trial was as fair as it could possibly have been in view of the general temper of the country and agreed that a wealth of circumstantial evidence indicated Adas' guilt.

Acting the devil's advocate, I asked the Rabbi if he didn't think the Government might have taken firmer steps to deal with the mass emotionalism.

He said in just about these words, "Perhaps. Perhaps there were some miscarriages of justice. But we hear that you in the United States did not treat your Japanese citizens so well in the emotionalism following Pearl Harbor. Yet, no great number of Americans packed up and left complaining that all equality and justice were ended in America. We Iraqi Jews are Iraqis. We were Iraqis in 1948. We suffered with the defeat of our country. Certainly there were hasty actions and much irresponsible talk. But they needed to be examined in the right perspective—*and by us as citizens here*—with action to be determined out of our ancient attachment to this land. These things happen in times of stress and confusion and for our country, the defeat in the Palestine war was of a kind with the reactions in America to Pearl Harbor."

Then he went on to say that, except for the Adas execution, the dismissal of Jewish employees by the Government and the execution in 1949 of some Jews—along with some Moslems and Christians—because of Communist activity, there had been no specific acts of hostility involving *Jews*. No Jewish shops were attacked. Business went on as usual in 1948 and early in 1949.

The focus of the frustration and anger had been Britain and the United States who were considered primarily responsible for the Palestine problem and the chief supporters of Zionism. The British and American Information Offices had been attacked and smashed. Interestingly enough, so had an Iraqi English-language newspaper, the *Iraqi Times*. There was strong anti-*Zionist* publicity in the Arabic press.

The important—*very important*—point is that with the exceptions noted

above and admitted by the Iraqi officials as well as the Jews, Iraq regarded the whole controversy and war as a *national* conflict. Rightly or wrongly Britain and America—and Israel—were their enemies.

By and large, the Jews of Iraq held the same position and the wise and responsible leadership of Iraqi Jews, understanding the immediate post-Palestine-war hysteria, were satisfied that the crisis would pass and life resume its normal and satisfactory pattern.

I cannot stress sufficiently how emphatically the Rabbi and these men emphasized this alignment. They—and I—regard it as the core of the whole situation.

What happened then? Why for example, if the Government had realized its mistake, could it not reinstate the discharged Jews? And why, if the leadership of the Jewish community had been convinced that with time the situation would become normal, had the great exodus taken place? These were the questions I now pressed.

Here is a review of the answers which, again, are practically the same as those given me by Umari in reply to similar questions.

In late 1948 and early 1949 there was a small migration of Jews to Israel. This was "illegal" and took place largely by crossing the border into Iran—a not difficult thing to do in this part of the world where borders are long and vague and desolate. Those who left were mostly young people—many of whom had been discouraged by the Government's dismissal of Jews and who felt that there would be no real opportunities for them in Iraq's future. Others—despite the sense of security which the Iraqi Jews had because of their recognized opposition to Zionism—were undoubtedly inspired by the Israeli victory and made the logical move from one country to another they regarded more favorably. A few older Jews—believing Israel was the fulfillment of Prophecy—also left.

But by mid-1949, the big propaganda guns were already going off in the United States. American dollars were going to save the Iraqi Jews—whether Iraqi Jews needed saving or not. There were daily "pogroms"—in the New York *Times* and under datelines which few noticed were from Tel Aviv.

By autumn of 1949, the Rabbi told me, they began, in Iraq itself, to feel the repercussions of this exaggerated campaign. The frenzy of American fundraisers began to infect the Jews of Iraq—and, understandably—to annoy the Iraqi Government.

"Why," he asked me, "didn't someone come to see *us* instead of negotiating with Israel to take in Iraqi Jews? Why didn't someone point out that the solid, responsible leadership of Iraqi Jews believed this to be their country—in good times or bad—and we were convinced the trouble would pass?"

But no such precautions were taken and, in their usual humanitarianism and innocence of the character of the Zionist-Israeli link, American Jews began shelling out. What had been—through most of 1949—a sporadic and surreptitious "emigration" was romanticized as "Operation Ali Baba."

Zionist agents began to appear in Iraq—among the youth—playing on a *general* uneasiness and indicating that American Jews were putting up large amounts of money to take them to Israel, where everything would be in apple-pie order. The emigration of children began to tear at the loyalties

of families and as the adults in a family reluctantly decided to follow their children, the stress and strain of loyalties spread to brothers and sisters. This is probably true here in a much more acute form than we might ordinarily realize, because the family—almost in a tribal or clannish sense—is so much more the basis of life than we know it. Several caches of arms were "discovered" in synagogues.

What both the Jews and the Government had believed to be only a passing phenomenon—emigration—began to assume the proportions of a *public* issue.

Some local Jews suspect the arms were "planted" by Zionist agents. "What did we want with them?" the Rabbi said. "Were we going to fight all of Iraq—even if our loyalties were with Israel, which they were not?"

Then a new phenomenon began to appear. Instead of the quiet, individualized emigration, there began to appear public demands to legalize the emigration of Jews—*en masse*. Both the Jews and the Government were embarrassed and efforts were made to stop the hue and cry in Iraq. But *in the United States* the "pogroms" were already under way and the Iraqi Government was being accused of holding the Jews against their will.

There were consultations between Governmental officials and the leaders of the Jewish community. The Government did not want the Jews to leave. They did not suspect the Iraqi Jews. But on the other hand, here they were confronted at a time of great, general confusion and dissatisfaction, with what appeared to be a group of Jews who no longer wanted to stay. They could not take the chance that this campaign was merely propaganda, as the Rabbi and older leaders suggested.

On the other hand, the Jewish leaders were so sure the trouble came from a few "extremists" they were not apprehensive when in March of 1950, the Government adopted a law which permitted Jews to leave Iraq by declaring their intention of doing so and advising them that such a declaration would automatically result in loss of Iraqi citizenship.

Proper machinery was then established for this procedure. By May 1950 only some 5,000 had registered for emigration. The Government was more pessimistic than the Jews. They estimated that as many as 50,000 Jews might leave the country. Arrangements were made with an American airline company to handle the transportation. By late autumn of 1950, the Rabbi said he believed something like 20,000 Jews had left. He stressed to me that he believed more than half of these were young people and because of this, the process kept mushrooming, for families found it impossible to resist the pull to be with their children.

Meanwhile, reports of vast sums of American money "for Iraqi Jews"—really for the State of Israel—kept spreading and with the legalizing of emigration, campaigning among Jews increased. The Government was whip-sawed. Zionist propaganda accused it of pogroms and violent action against Jews. In reply, the Government issued a calm and deliberate law offering free choice to the Jews to leave. But if the Government attempted to suppress Zionist agitation attempting to stampede the Iraqi Jews, it was again accused of discrimination.

I was reminded, as I listened to this account, of how often I have thought recently how Zionism has completely confused most Jews and distorted

most values. Once a Government which legislated expulsion was accused of "anti-Semitism." Now it is a Government which seeks to reassure its Jewish citizens and may even take steps to protect them against the foreign, Zionist nationalism which is so designated. Isn't it strange that by modern Israel-Zionist standards, Torquemada and the 15th century Spanish Inquisitors would be "friends of the Jews"? And our own Mr. Byroade—trying to tell the Israelis to lay off American (or other national) Jewish citizens—is slandered as an "anti-Semite."

The "free" and "voluntary" (their words) character of the election open to Jews to stay or leave was constantly stressed in the conversation. The pressures came from Jews—not the Government or the Moslem or Christian Iraqis.

I remember the exact word—as translated—which the Rabbi used to describe what was clearly a synthetic and designed panic. "Sheep headed" was what he called the reaction of the masses of Jews.

By the end of 1950, some 60,000 Jews had registered for emigration. Open agitation for more recruits was at a peak in the closing months of the year. There was general concern that—having stirred these people to renounce their citizenship and opt for Israel—Zionists would not be able to get them out of the country since the Government could terminate the arrangement any time.

The hysteria in Iraq was outdone only by the hysteria in the United States—all of which was reflected back in Iraq in increasing Government irritation and by stepped-up campaigns to be "ingathered."

Then a synagogue was bombed. Who was responsible has never been finally determined, but the Iraqi Jews believe it was also the work of Zionist agents. And the incident set off a fresh wave of registrants.

Finally, in March of 1951 the whole procedure of registration was suspended. The Government also published in the spring of 1951—the Rabbi thinks it was some time in April—the law which froze their property. All Iraqi Jews living abroad were informed that if they did not return in two months they would forfeit their status. They were also advised they might declare their intention of retaining their citizenship—without returning—to proper Iraqi authorities in the countries where they were living abroad.

Such is the romanticism of "Operation Ali Baba" as seen—*by Jews*—from this side of the Zionist curtain.

I do not mean to whitewash the Iraqi Government. If I did, it would be more than the Government people tried to do themselves.

The impression I want to give—and which both Jews and others there attempted to give, as I evaluate it—is that a period of insecurity *did* exist. There were tangible and intangible factors converging to make it inevitable. It was due *basically* to the Palestine problem—plus—the highly emotionalized fundraising techniques in the United States which simply exacerbated beyond repair a situation all responsible people *on the scene* felt would normalize itself.

If American Jews knew the history of Zionism, they would look twice before they underwrote all ideas stamped out of the Zionist-Israel machine. I am reminded—now as I review this Baghdad conversation—that in the early

days of Herzl he and his colleagues agitated the Jews of Rumania to the point where many were selling their properties and preparing to go to Palestine even before Herzl had any right to encourage Jews to settle there since it was still Turkish territory. Someone—I've forgotten who—had to straighten out the mess when the Rumanian officials would not permit these "exiles" to cross the borders.

But the tragedy of this Iraqi story is not yet all history. These people here receive word now and then from their friends and relatives in Israel. This is managed via London, Paris and other centers with the help of mutual friends or other relatives who emigrated—but not to Israel. And here they know that "Oriental Jews" (as they describe themselves here) are among the most tragic people in Israel.

They suffer discrimination of all kinds—not the least because they are largely "white collar" folks, with dark skins and Arab culture and the Western (East European) Jews resent their presence.

When these stories come back to Baghdad it is like turning the knife in the wound. Not only have strong ties of family and friendship been torn to shreds—but apparently all for bitterness, a caste-status and general unhappiness in Israel.

"They are lost to us forever," one of the young men said.

While this is the condition of those who were "saved" in Israel, the condition here is normalizing itself.

Full passport rights were restored to Jews only a few days before we arrived. Umari had already told me this with a great deal of pride. One of the men we met was just preparing, as a matter of fact in view of this new legislation, for an extended trip to the United States—with a special emphasis on renewing his contacts with General Motors.

The Rabbi is working now with the Government on a draft of a law to legalize smaller numbers of directors to manage the affairs of Jewish incorporated societies. This will release certain corporate funds of a religious, social and cultural nature. The Jews told me they were a rich community—now overly rich for there will be released to the 5,000 still remaining the communal assets of 130,000 people. Private assets, I was assured, are well regulated and safeguarded by the Government by a special department.

This again confirms what Umari told me. He had offered to let me see the records and to talk to the man acting as conservator of these private assets. I did not accept the offer because I imagined that any intelligent appraisal of them would require an accountant's skill and certainly more time than I had. The Jews, for their part, are satisfied the management is satisfactory.

The fairly obvious and imminent revival of the 5,000 Jews still here in the midst of a country clearly entering a period of immense prosperity and increasing political maturity is also a source of pain to these people. For they deplore more than ever the stampede which took their kith and kin away.

It was a kind of delayed reaction which made me realize suddenly that after all the "pogroms," the "terror," the "bombings" and other "outrages" *we* had experienced *in the American press,* I was sitting calmly in a lovely office, talking to a representative group of 5,000 Jews still here and doing

nicely—*by their own, willing* admission. And I suddenly realized that I, too—and you and all of us—had been duped. Why could 5,000 continue to live here, not as Marranos or hiding in corners, but openly and with dignity and confidence—and in the capital city of this country—if the conditions in 1949-1951 had been what we had been told?

In the face of this fact—of which I was a living and breathing part last Thursday—all theories and rationalizations became unimportant. And when I admitted the queer sensation I was experiencing, talking to people who were not there—if United Jewish Appeal propaganda was to be believed—the youngest of the three men said to me the only difference between those who were in the room and those who had left was that "we did not lose our heads but we failed to prevent others from losing theirs."

Whatever the specific accuracy of any single part of this account, 5,000 Jews here—*now*—are some pretty strong evidence that the story ground out of Tel Aviv and New York left much to be desired in the way of truth. At least I cannot add it up any differently.

Finally, it was time for us to leave. I was a mixture of rage, frustration and enervating sadness. I realized I had been sitting as witness to one of the historic examples of Jews' inhumanities to Jews, motivated by the surge of national power. I saw before me the "approach to youth" in America and realized why Mr. Ben Gurion had said he could pull it off against the will of parents. He had had a successful experience in Iraq—*financed by American Jews.* I felt ashamed and impotent and frustrated, despite all we had tried to do. American Jews had made possible—however innocently—the utter destruction of dignified and happy lives and I thought of how glibly all our United Jewish Appeal campaigners went to Israel *only* and came back with glowing stories; but how none dignified these Jews in Iraq—let alone the Iraqi Government—by hearing *their* side of the story. And you ask yourself—"How long, O Lord! How long!" with the same tragedy being enacted today in North Africa.

As we were leaving, the youngest of the three who had spoken before, broke down and wept pitifully. "Thank you for coming to Iraq," he said, "and for talking to the Government of our country and for letting them see and meet a Jew who is from America and who is also not a Zionist, as we are not Zionists. This visit will be good for us and please promise to come again." I could hardly speak myself and even what I could say seemed trivial and stupid. Then, when he regained his composure, he apologized and said, "You can understand, I hope. It was no little thing for us to stay and to see our friends and families going mad and being encouraged in their madness by American Jews and agents of Israel."

His father-in-law, the senior partner in the business, walked to the door with us as I said goodbye to the Rabbi and the other man. He put his arm on my shoulder and explained that he was older and somewhat more resigned. Then he said, "Tell the Jews of America that no Jew who wants to be loyal to his country can do anything but oppose Zionism with all of his substance. We learned the lesson here too late, believing things could never become as evil as they did. Now we are rebuilding but the success we are having only deepens our grief for those who are shut off from us by a fanatical political organization." Those are almost his exact words. And they speak for themselves.

You can, I think therefore, imagine the very great emotional disturbance I have experienced these past few days. It was compounded by my first visit to an Arab refugee camp yesterday. But this I shall leave for another letter. I could not escape the conclusion however, as I looked at the squalor of those Arabs, that for *greed* and what we call "campaign Judaism," 120,000 Iraqi Jews are now in a place they do *not* want to be, living in the homes and on the lands where, perhaps, some of the 3,000 miserable Arab refugees I saw yesterday once lived, and to which they would like to return.

And then, humbly in the face of this tragedy, it helps but little to be convinced of the rightness of what we are doing and of the wrongness of the appeasers and the "statesmen" and the "humanitarians" and all the others who find reasons why the vicious, ruthless Zionist war against Jews goes on; a war in this part of the world in which Jews are both the conquerors and the victims, depending upon whether they are a part of the clique or simply well-meaning people who want to be left alone.

This, I think, is enough for now. I only wish every Jew in America had experienced with me these past three days.

Ruth joins in best to all.

Elmer

May 12, 1955
BEIRUT

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

I have just come from a stimulating hour-long meeting with the Lebanese Foreign Minister. Because I can report quickly—before hurrying off to another appointment—I shall send this on to you and leave a report of the refugee problem as I see it and now understand it until I have more time.

I have consistently talked straight to all of these people and I therefore made it clear that the interest of Americans was a peace between Israel and the Arabs.

But I have followed the Dulles and Byroade position that the United States will not be party to *forcing* a peace; that the *conditions* for peace must emerge from these countries *themselves*.

This strikes a responsive note, for *before* there can be specific negotiations for peace some basic attitudes and conditions must be changed. Not the least of these is firm—and I mean firm—assurance that what the Arabs must deal with is Israel—not Zionism; that the negotiations will be carried on with a political entity representing the people of Palestine and not with the vanguard *in Palestine* of a Zionist empire influencing Washington, London and even Paris.

These people also want peace and you have to see this area to understand why. The biggest secret that Zionism has kept from Americans—including Jews—is the enormous *internal* development of these Arab States. And the Arabs themselves have done a bad job of public relations.

The sound, realistic basis for an American policy of justice and fair treatment for *all* of these countries becomes crystal clear. I have not seen Israel yet but, regardless of what we may or may not find, these Arab countries are anything but backward, decadent, Bedouin areas as Zionist propaganda would have us believe.

The countries we have visited so far are prosperous, busy and building. This seems to be a cosmopolitan city with beautiful hotels, lovely homes and well-stocked shops. The rural areas are, in many places, poor and backward. But the important fact is that the people here are conscious of their shortcomings and are determined to overcome them. They want to get on with jobs that are in some places well advanced—and to be left alone.

So there is a basis of self-interest—for them—on which to talk peace. But the basis of self-interest runs into a blind alley when you talk of Israel. For they say, "What Israel are you talking of? The Israel we now see or the Israel supported politically and economically by the Jews of the world?"

Our position therefore becomes very important and they are intensely interested in our progress. They care little about what arms Israel receives—or what Arab states receive—except in relation to the question of *what kind of an Israel* is being strengthened. I do not have time to report all the details. But as I left the Foreign Minister said, "Tell the American people we are less interested in the size and strength of Israel than we are in the *character* of Israel. Is it to be a small state in an area of small states? Or is it to be the beachhead of Zionist colonialism?"

I thought this an enormously pertinent summary. The question facing American Jews has not been properly put by the Zionists—or perhaps even by us. The question is not whether the Arabs recognize the "reality" of Israel. The question is rather, now that the Arabs *do* recognize the reality of a Zionist Israel, what are Israel and American Jews prepared to do about it?

I do not know that I shall have any success persuading Council people—but I am convinced beyond all doubt that we *can* exercise an influence for peace if we take a somewhat less stringent position. But more of this when I return and whether I can so persuade them or not, these are the facts. It is interesting that *every* Arab suggests I go to Israel to see for myself. They apparently have little, if anything, to hide.

Tonight the U. S. Ambassador here is having Ruth and me to dinner. After all the heat and dust I am afraid to look at my tuxedo—but it will have to do.

I do not yet know if we shall be given visas for Israel. The American Ambassador here has been kind enough to cable Jerusalem in an effort to find out.

We are a little tired.

The Middle East day starts at 8 a.m.—usually my first appointment. Then it continues solidly until around 1 a.m. The Middle Easterners sleep

in the afternoon. I usually find myself busy with the Americans then, so I get it from both ends.

This is pretty hurried and general, except for the precise quotation which is the real purpose of sending this while it is still fresh in my mind.

I'm rushing off to see George Kirk of Chatham House—"ex"— fame. I expect to hear an interesting story.

Best,

Elmer

May 14, 1955

DAMASCUS

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

I have been wanting to write my impressions of the Arab refugee situation for over a week but it is a very complicated story and I have not had the time even to start it, much less the prospect of finishing it. We arrived here last evening after a drive from Beirut through some of the most beautiful country I have ever seen.

The mountains of Lebanon are magnificent and the fertile valley between the two ranges is a striking contrast to them.

Before we left Lebanon I had a very pleasant talk with President Camille Chamoun, accompanied by Mr. Donald R. Heath our Ambassador. The talk lasted a long time—nearly an hour—and again I was impressed with the reasonableness and the willingness to consider a peace *provided* what confronts the Arabs is an Israel in, and of, the Middle East and not a state which is part of a world-wide "Jewish people." Can the gap be bridged? I do not know, but I do know that it cannot be done without a lot more realistic appraisal of the situation by *American Jews*. And isn't it strange that the realists—*at home*—are those who say "Let's not quibble about ideologies," while out here the *ideology* is the *very guts of reality*. The frank and candid way in which I have stated *our* position regarding an Israel

which is just another foreign state and the surprisingly gracious, frank, hospitable reception I have had is perhaps some kind of proof of this.

Isn't it strange that to the people with whom the Israelis say they want to make peace those of us who are anti-Zionists are the best understood; and that the questions of these people are not directed to information about Israel but rather to an intense searching of the attitude of American Jews? They believe the key to stability in the area lies with these American Jews—and so do I. But these American Jews will have to do some very hard thinking along with their check-writing before they can unlock the door.

In many ways our stay in Syria promises to be the most fascinating of any place we have been. Here one finds all of the complex forces of the Arab world and superimposed upon them is the instability of the French governmental system, plus only ten years of freedom from cruel and bitter French colonialism. But I have a little time this morning and shall make a start at this letter in the hope that I may be able to finish it no later than a day or two from now.

I should begin by saying I have enjoyed the advantage of looking at and inquiring into the refugee problem with the help of the most authoritative people concerned. These included top people in the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) including Mr. Leslie Carver who is an Englishman and Deputy Director; the official leaders of the Arab refugee office (refugees themselves) in Beirut, several camp leaders and President Chamoun. I also talked to numerous UNRWA social workers and educational experts working with the Arab refugee problem.

In addition there are many Americans in Beirut—not the least Colonel William A. Eddy of Aramco—who knows the Middle East like the back of his hand and who has done a great deal in an effort to alleviate some of the most critical phases of this tragic problem. I have sat in refugee homes, in refugee camps, in modest offices and seen simple handicraft and educational projects at first hand. So, perhaps, I am now prepared to sum up—at least a little.

I shall probably obtain more information in Jordan but I think I have the basic information. Whatever we find in Jordan should be only an aggravated substantiation of the facts we already have. One half the population of that unfortunate state are refugees and there are *more* refugee camps and settlements in Jordan than there are regular villages or cities.

Let me begin with the statistics and definitions, for they are expressive in themselves.

Since there is a great deal of loose talk in the U. S. about the legitimacy of many of these refugees, let me say first that there are fairly specific conditions which must be filled before a person is accepted—by UNRWA—as a refugee. Here they are:

1. They must have lived in Palestine for at least two years prior to 1948.
2. They must have lost their homes and livelihood as a result of the Palestine war.
3. New births and, in some cases, more recent loss of income which can be attributed to the Palestine situation qualify for registration.

There are frequent differences of opinion between UNRWA and refugees and sometimes between UNRWA and some of the Arab Governments as to the status of new applicants for refugee relief. But, on the whole, the figures represent authentic cases.

Under the above definitions, UNRWA lists the following refugee populations (I am putting them in round figures as I wrote them down):

1.	Lebanon	105,000
2.	Syria	86,000
3.	Jordan	490,000
4.	Gaza (Egyptian controlled territory)	220,000
	Total	901,000

This figure, of course, is not the total number of refugees, which may be closer to 960,000-975,000, since some have migrated and many do not qualify as UNRWA refugees because they are able to take care of themselves. Those who have migrated—many to Latin America and Europe—probably will not return in any considerable numbers and the "problem" for them will be largely a question of adequate compensation.

Of the roughly 900,000 figure, nearly half are fifteen years of age—or less.

Further, of these 900,000, there are other interesting breakdowns.

1. Those who do not live in camps but who have been "absorbed"—in some degree as individual citizens—by the Arab states. This figure may reach 35% to 40%. Most of these are in Syria, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon—though not in that order, insofar as numbers are concerned.

"Absorption" may not be a technically correct word since some of these people are not really convinced they will live on in these countries. The only precise way to define "absorption" in this sense is to say they are not living in camps.

2. Those in camps. This represents from 55% to 60%—mostly in Jordan and Gaza.
3. The other 10% (around 100,000) live in what are called border villages. They are, in most ways perhaps, the most pitiful and tragic for they are neither in camps nor "absorbed." Because of technical considerations used to define a refugee, they are—generally—*not* entitled to whatever UNRWA aid is available. Some of them receive half-rations. Others receive none.

To these figures must be added a normal, net increase through birth over death of 25,000 a year.

The living conditions of these people vary. I was surprised by what appeared to me to be a situation analogous to that among the Jewish refugees who found their way to the States. A few are *very* well off. They—like the German Jews in a few cases—had money abroad. Most of these are in Lebanon which has always been a center of trade and finance, and so it is natural that some of the wealthier Palestinians should have had holdings there. This is a small group in numbers but with political and financial significance.

A considerable group lives in moderate circumstances. Some of these were wealthy in Palestine on the basis of salaries they earned but, unlike business-owners, had no capital abroad. They are still living with some measure of self-respect and some of the amenities either on borrowed funds or by selling assets like jewelry, summer homes in the mountain resort areas of Lebanon and other personal properties. They would approximate an upper middle class now depressed to marginal security and are perhaps among the most embittered and articulate, since the change in their status is probably the most severe—and their future the most hopeless.

The vast majority of those not in camps eke out existences. Some may be worse off than in Palestine. A very few may be better off. Most are not nearly so well situated as in their former homes. But apart from current economic status, they are stateless, unsettled and largely objects of charity. They are often boarded by relatives. Others manage shelter by living together in crowded quarters so that by volume they manage to pay the rent and scratch together food and clothing.

I have tried to put down here only a kind of skeleton, statistical picture. This hardly takes into account other *very real* factors such as mental and emotional states; the feeling of betrayal by Zionists like Weizmann and other "moderates" who kept assuring them their future in Palestine was secure. Many of them actually believed that there was a common front between themselves and the Zionists to throw off the Mandate and make Palestine a free but integral part of the Arab world with guaranteed security for a "national home" as the term had been variously defined to Arabs in the many efforts to assuage their constant fears.

Some of these are nearly as bitter about the Arab governments as about the Israelis and America and Britain. Their embitterment is not always logical or realistic—but it is understandable and an inevitable accompaniment of their condition. In any event it is a reality with which everyone here—and anyone thinking about this problem—must be concerned.

And whatever else one may say about them, it is clear that those who are *not* in camps, but who mix freely in the population of the countries where they now are residents, are one very understandable reason why there is little ground for hoping that "with the passage of time the tensions in the Middle East will ease by themselves." They won't—without just and proper adjustment of the position of this group of refugees.

One of them, in whose home I was a guest for tea, said to me, "Your position of accepting the reality of Israel and attempting a solution of the problem on the basis of a Middle Eastern state without further Zionist pretensions is valid—*now*. But it will not any longer be valid a few years from now if the refugee problem is not satisfactorily solved. For *I* lived with the Jews of Palestine. *I* knew many of them and they were my friends. Although I can no longer be in contact with them, I hope they are still my friends. In the old days we would sit together and plan for the independence of a country we regarded as our common property.

"But *I* am growing older—and my contemporaries in Palestine are also growing older. My *children* are growing up without having known these friends of mine in Palestine. All they see is that we are shut off from our home, our property, our roots. They are already telling me I am a foolish, sentimental old man.

"The same must be happening in Israel and if nothing is done to remove the barriers before these children become leaders, there can be little hope for any peaceful settlement of the problem.

"Furthermore," he said, "*I* believe you—and your Council—when you say you are Jews who reject Zionism. I have known such Jews all my life—some of them in Palestine. But again, my children will regard the Council's formula as only another Zionist trick unless there is some concrete evidence —in those phases of this problem which directly affect their lives—of the strength and validity of your principles among large numbers of American Jews."

This man, himself, is very well off financially and politically. He has had the advantages of education at the American University of Beirut and extensive contacts in Western Europe. He is also a Christian.

I give you his background because, without in any way reflecting on others of the refugees to whom I spoke, I would say that this man was in an excellent, *personal* position to speak of the problem dispassionately and objectively.

I am strongly inclined to agree with his analysis.

It is, of course, the camp population which presents the hard core of the problem from the viewpoint of any solution. The best camps I have seen so far are in ancient army barracks left in Lebanon by the French.

The UNRWA people told me that slowly they are building new huts in many of the worst camps but I have not yet seen any of these since they are mostly in Gaza and Jordan. If I remember correctly, the last of the tents in Gaza will soon be—or already have been—replaced by small, concrete huts which at least are a protection against the weather.

You can imagine what the French barracks are like. They are about 30 years old. They were completely abandoned when the French decided to leave at the end of World War II and they now are crowded beyond description. These are the best.

The worst living conditions are in caves and some of the tent camps are only slightly better. Here human beings live like animals. And they are worse off than animals for an animal has the instinct for keeping itself clean and alive. These people too have the instincts, but they have none of the facilities a human needs. They are literally rotting on the hoof and completely disintegrating mentally and morally. I have seen the camps in Germany where Jews lived. These Arab refugee camps are no better—and in some places they are worse. The squalor, lack of protection against the elements, the human degradation and above all, the eternal despair are crushingly palpable in the very atmosphere. I think I never have seen anything like it—and I hope never to have to look at anything similar again.

But the condition of the refugees is not the whole tragedy. No less appalling and depressing is the frame of mind of those charged with "solving" or "alleviating" this problem. It is difficult to suppress the overpowering surge of moral outrage one feels as he looks at the refugees, hears the story of impartial people like those of UNRWA (let alone the refugee spokesmen themselves) and sees in his mind Mr. Eban's glib advice that the Arab states have a lot of land and let them absorb these people. It is

another thing to look at a fraction of "these people" and see them—and their children—as living human beings offered Mr. Eban's glib solution. And I could not stand in these places—remembering that I am a Jew—and not cringe with shame and disgrace and—I do not hesitate to say it—a hatred of the "Jewish" racism that created a state which now says these people cannot live in it because they are not Jews.

Regardless of why these people left Palestine—who was it that created a State where *before* an oath of allegiance one's ethnic or religious beliefs are counted? Who kept insisting that there must be a *political* entity guaranteeing a preferential treatment to people of one faith so that they might become a majority? Who now—without apology—insists that this majority must be maintained and therefore too many people of other faiths or ethnic origins cannot possibly be good citizens?

The monstrous nature of this ideology is everywhere apparent here—and as one who believes Judaism is a universal faith and political loyalties are something else (but in any event in an enlightened civilization cannot be linked to race or faith), I find answers to some of these questions difficult.

I can only say that—thanks to all of you who have made the Council possible—I am able to talk to these people as one human being to another and feel, at least personally, that we are doing what we can to make the words "universal faith" more than just fine language. I ask those who may read this and who may feel I have lost my balance to remember that the Christian world—even those who had no part in Hitler's persecution of Jews—was shocked and revolted. Many of them became pro-Zionist as a result—not knowing the awful consequences that would follow out here. And I ask my friends also to keep in mind that last year 25,000 Americans (obviously few of them Jews) were tourists in Lebanon. You cannot travel more than a few miles out of Beirut before this devastating spectacle is before you. And I—in turn—looking at that scene and remembering this, thought too of how American Jews publicly and gleefully boast of, and feast, the Ambassadors of the State which now maintains this situation and how these American Jews applaud the "sovereignty" of Israel which enables Mr. Ben-Gurion and Mr. Sharett to say, "Not a single refugee shall return."

What a storehouse of hatred and bitterness we are stocking without as much as a cry of protest! For, as I said above, the tragedy is that there is no solution for these people, under at least 20 years, unless Israel does adopt a sympathetic attitude and agrees to the *principle* of the rights of these people and offers *very* generous compensation.

This is all I have time for now. In a day or so, I hope to find a few minutes to finish this report and to analyze—with something of the viewpoint I have picked up here—the suggestion that these people can be settled in the "vast" Arab lands.

Damascus is very beautiful and we are going out now to see some of it in detail.

Ruth joins me in sending our very best to Lil, Edith—both of you—and your families.

As ever,

Elmer

May 16, 1955
DAMASCUS

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

I am tempted to write you something of what we have seen in this majestically beautiful city—and of some of the things we have done in the last two days—but I do want to finish my story of the Arab refugee problem as I know it so far. The rest will wait for another time.

I recall on Saturday I closed my letter by saying I would offer the answer you hear out here to the gratuitous advice offered by Israel that the Arabs have enough land—let them resettle the refugees.

In one of my earlier letters I vaguely remember writing of these "vast lands." There is no doubt that—by Israeli standards—they are big. But you might as well say that Idaho, Nevada or Arizona should relieve the slum conditions in Newark or Baltimore, because the area of these Western states is greater than that of either New Jersey or Maryland.

The Zionist-Israeli suggestion takes no account of the *desires* of the people—in the first place.

In the second place—even if those desires were not important (and I do not see how any decent, human solution of the problem can ignore them)—the "vast areas" of the Arab world are mostly desert.

Israel—and the Zionists—who boast so much of what labor is involved and of how much money it costs to irrigate a desert should be the first to know that mere land area out here is meaningless. And—until very recently in some places and not even yet in others—these countries have not had the money or the skilled labor or the political freedom to reclaim and cultivate these lands, where that is possible.

Some of them are beginning—Egypt and Iraq, for example. Lebanon is talking more seriously again of developing the Litani River project. But while Mr. Eban and Mr. Ben-Gurion remind the "philanthropists" in the U. S. that it takes years and years (wasn't the last estimate twenty years?) to develop a sound economy; and while they say also the Arabs are "backward" and "feudalistic" while Israel has the skills to revive the Middle East, they expect (by their propaganda) these "backward" Arabs, without a United Jewish Appeal and Bond sales, to take in and resettle these 900,000 and more refugees in any given week or month.

It is this kind of loose and irresponsible talk from Israelis and Zionists—and particularly the constantly implied differentiation between "them and us," the "Arab world" and "Israel"—which leads everyone out here to suspect heartily the generalities in which Israel and Zionists and pro-Zionist non-Zionists say they are all for peace.

But let me be somewhat more precise about all this.

Lebanon is a country of 1,300,000 people. It is prosperous. It finds its economic health in trade and in specialized agriculture—particularly

fine fruits. There is also a large income from resort life which Lebanon provides for all the Middle East. But there is little if any land available now. Lebanon has one large river—the Litani. The project to develop the Litani for power and irrigation will cost a substantial amount of money. The river is very close to Israel. When you see it and realize the cost involved, you feel the fear the Lebanese have that when the project is done, Israel will expand. And when you say the U. S. will not permit it, they laugh in your face and ask why they should believe that on the basis of the past. This is an important fact—this fear and lack of faith in a United States where Zionist influence boasts of its power. For Lebanon would like to develop this Litani project. And this is a powerful motivation for peace with Israel, for the uncertainty is holding back Lebanese development.

But until this project is finished—and it is now only in the blue-print stage—how can you expect the country to absorb a group that equals 10 percent of its present population? Furthermore, the Lebanese situation is complicated by the political structure of the country. A neat, fairly happy but sensitive balance between Moslems and Christians has been established. Most of the refugees are Moslems and if Lebanon were to accept them, it would almost certainly have serious political repercussions because this very delicate balance would be destroyed.

Or take Egypt. It is experiencing a fascinating social and economic revolution. There are 22,000,000 people in the country.

The vast majority of this population is huddled into a narrow strip along the Nile because that is the only source of water. In some places, if you go up high enough, standing in the desert on either side, you can easily see across this ribbon of green to the endless sands on the other side.

Land reform is making progress. It is one of the "musts" recognized by the present Government. But it is a slow, complicated process. One night in Cairo we were at dinner with the man—a former large land-owner himself—who is in charge of the land reform program. You cannot just throw out the old owners, draw lines and move in new people. The new owners must be prepared and they must be equipped to do farming in modern ways. They face new problems which—as tenant farmers or in some other capacity—they did not face before. They have to learn how to manage, how to market and hundreds of other things which do not occur to someone who is unfamiliar with the technicalities. If such preparation is not made, the yield from the land will fall and the country will be worse off than it was before the reform.

There are still 6,000,000 people in the country, barely existing even on the basis of a primitive society. There is a great poverty—not helped any by the refusal of the British to buy Egyptian cotton and by American policy on the same commodity.

While we were in Cairo there were repeated stories of Nasser seeking trade agreements with Red China; and this powerful, economic need may have been a considerable factor in his attendance at Bandung.

I saw, with my own eyes, evidence of an over-supply of labor. Desert roads are watered by human hands because labor is cheaper than trucks and the gasoline to power them. A man brings a small bucket of water from an irrigation ditch 20 feet from the road, throws it on the dust and

goes back for more. And there is such a man every 100 yards for miles on end.

In Gaza, where there are 220,000 refugees and another 100,000 permanent residents, 6,000 people are working. For the rest, no work is possible. Even the majority of the 100,000 original residents are unable to eke out a living for their lands are across the line in Israel and they are shot if they cross the line to try to recapture sheep or goats that have wandered across the shallow ditch which is called a boundary.

I believe Egypt does not really want Gaza. But it would be tempting the political fates—and perhaps jeopardizing the whole future of the country—to agree easily to take in the 220,000 refugees.

Despite these problems in Lebanon and Egypt the *facts* are that in Lebanon a great many refugees are "absorbed" into the country—quite apart from those living in camps.

And one would think when Mr. Eban recommends to the Arab countries that they solve this problem, he would have the decency to indicate some of the things being done by Arab States to alleviate this tragedy.

There is, for example, the agreement of Egypt to explore—with UNRWA—the possibility of resettling 50,000 to 70,000 refugees in the Sinai Peninsula. But this is more difficult to do than for Mr. Eban to make a speech soothing the consciences of United Jewish Appeal contributors. The very problems of water are the principal obstacle and in raising this obstacle there is evidence from UNRWA engineers—at least equally as objective as a spokesman for the Israeli Government—that the obstacles are considerable.

Or Iraq. Here is undoubtedly the fastest growing state in the area. The Government officials do not hesitate to say that they have the money, the water, and the people to make Iraq a great country. It has a population of 6,000,000. It has development plans that would do credit to the United States. But this will take time. As much as 20 years. One has the feeling they are hurrying too fast as it is.

UNRWA records reveal that Iraq has taken about 5,000 refugees and these are cared for by the Iraqi Government.

The UNRWA people said that there was no doubt Iraq could absorb the entire refugee population. But this would mean that at the end of 20 years Iraq's living standard would support 7,000,000 rather than its present 6,000,000—*at the present standards.* This is the considered opinion of *UNRWA economists*—not of any Iraqi. So, we shall ask Iraq to surrender *voluntarily* 20 years of its life and resources to solve a problem which it feels began as an injustice against Arabs anyhow. The answer is obvious.

We come then to Syria. Here is much the same story as Iraq. This country is prosperous and doing remarkable things in the way of education and reclamation of land. It has a small population—only about 4,000,000. There are, however, serious internal political problems created—not by dictatorship—but by freedom patterned on the French system. And in a country where political independence is only ten years old this freedom makes for instability. Syria could probably absorb its 85,000 refugees—at least within a few years. But the political repercussions, both here and in the other Arab States which economically could *not* follow suit, would be calamitous. If this seems like a poor excuse for not doing something in this problem, let it be remembered that the majority coalition of Israel still is forced to take

a belligerent attitude toward foreign affairs or else there will be political upheaval there.

Despite these difficulties and admitting—in order to remove it from the argument—that *some* political figures in the Arab world use the refugee problem even as the Zionists used the refugee problem for political purposes—the problems of land and water remain.

It is cynical and unscrupulous for Israelis and Zionists to say: "Lift the status of the *fellahin* and end poverty if you want to get along as well as we" and then, in the next breath to say, "Take in these refugees because you have a lot of land."

There have been—as a matter of fact—several rehabilitation projects in Syria. But they are very small and very expensive—both limitations created by the unavailability of water. In one, rather near Damascus, after much effort each of some 50 families may be able to earn about $300 a year.

All I am trying to demonstrate here, as it was demonstrated to me, is that the problem is far beyond the cheap propaganda approach offered by Israel and Zionists to America.

There are two other countries involved. One is Saudi Arabia. This is really an under-developed country, admitted to be so by many Arabs themselves. It is still little more than a loose confederation of tribes. The old King controlled them fairly well. The new King is weak and is having a hat-full of troubles. The only source of wealth is oil and the oil companies, as a matter of fact, are taking some of the refugees and training them to work in the installations. I was invited by the Chairman of the Board of Aramco, whom I met in Beirut, to fly with him to Dahran to see some of these refugees myself but I could not afford the two days' time involved. Saudi Arabia in its present condition can, in the final analysis, contribute little to a solution of this problem.

Finally, there is Jordan. Everyone knows Jordan is an economic and political artificiality created and maintained by the British. Its normal population is about 400,000—mostly Bedouins, although there is a fair-sized settled population in Amman and Jerusalem. Now, there are as many —perhaps more—refugees than original Jordanians. The country has no money, except the sums paid by Britain to the Arab Legion, revenue from tourist trade to Jerusalem and about $14,000,000 a year spent, one way or another, by UNRWA on the refugees. To suggest that these nearly half-million refugees be absorbed by Jordan is pure political and economic fantasy. If the Johnston plan is accepted—and today Israeli demands offer the chief obstacles—in about four years about 100,000 of the refugees now in Jordan could be absorbed by the Yarmuk River development. By that time, the normal increase of 25,000 a year will have cancelled out the "advance" in terms of the total problem.

Yet, Jordan too has gone a long way toward alleviating the present situation. The Government is cooperating with UNRWA to resolve the problem of housing. There has been a steady—even if slow—removal of people from the ration roles as agricultural settlements are developed in cooperation with the Jordanian Government.

There is the Development Bank of Jordan, with a capital of some 400,000 Jordanian pounds (something over a million dollars) which lends money to refugees to improve land, to dig wells and for similar improve-

ments. A tobacco industry has been started—financed, at least in part, with money from this Bank. And the hotel where we plan to stay in Jerusalem—and which has just been opened—is also a result of financing made available to refugees by this Bank.

These are the facts of the problem—gathered not from Arab Governments but from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency people. The Arab Governments are perfectly happy to have any honest investigator gather information from UNRWA for there is nothing to hide. Meanwhile, UNRWA has an average of seven cents a day to provide these people with food (1,500 calories a day) and some form of housing, medical care and social counsel. When this figure was mentioned, the UNRWA people reminded me that the United States allowed 70 cents a day to maintain Communist prisoners of war, captured in Korea.

UNRWA is developing several programs of education and handicrafts. The children would otherwise be illiterate and the morale of adults would collapse completely. We bought a fairly substantial amount of the things produced by the advanced handicraft groups. It is well made and artistically finished.

This work, in Beirut, is under the direction of a dynamic little gal named Catherine Jabber. She not only knows handicrafts—she is a whale of a salesgirl who could make a pile of dough at Saks or Bergdorf. Some way might be found to market these things in the United States and when I return—on my own—I shall make some inquiries in Washington regarding exemption from import duty and other technical details.

Meanwhile, UNRWA finds difficulty supplying cheap odds and ends of cloth which beginners use to gain experience and practice in these handicrafts. I think it would be wonderful if somehow we could gather remnants of almost any kind of yardage goods to send for this purpose.

There are stories of fantastically ludicrous situations in the third category of refugees—the border villages. In one place there is a village where the well was 450 *feet* from the center of the settlement. Now that well is in Israel and the inhabitants of the village must walk 4½ miles to obtain water. This situation is duplicated many times and makes the border villages perhaps the most bitter and troublesome of all. It is literally true that these people sit all day and look across a mythical line or perhaps a meshed-wire fence and watch Israelis knock down their houses and build new ones and harvest crops on land which a few years ago was their source of livelihood.

I am convinced it is true that there has never been anything like this in the history of modern man. That it should breed bitter hatred and offer fertile ground for Communist agitation is as simple as A B C. That in the long run Israel cannot survive this situation is also evident for *if*—as Israel wants—these people are forcefully absorbed into the Arab States a leaven of hatred and antagonism will be distributed which must one day erupt with a violence that will be uncontrollable.

Israel, I believe, could take a very long stride toward peace if she would adopt a policy of generosity toward this key problem of the area. The Arabs would consider such a move as an indication of a profound, grass-roots change of attitude in Israel; a switch from Zionism to a Middle Eastern State. If, for example, Mr. Eban were to admit Israel is a part of the Middle East and, including Israel, say, "*We Middle Easterners* together

must solve the problem of these million refugees," the impact here would be different from that which is created when the Israeli Ambassador to the United States—talking of Arab refugees—speaks as if the Arabs were Middle Easterners and Israel something else. Talk of this kind—*before generalities* about the peace she says she wants—would produce a little of the good faith which Israel must create before she can have peace.

This letter has been spread over three days. I am off now for a session with James Moose, our own Ambassador here. We leave Saturday for Jerusalem. I am still not sure we will obtain permission to enter Israel. There is still no answer to the telegram Mr. Heath, our Ambassador, sent from Beirut. I have done all I can and now we shall see what will develop.

I hope all goes well. I am tired, for this trip has been hard work—but I think it has helped a little to create some goodwill out here. Let us hope so. Ruth joins in sending our best to all.

Elmer

May 21, 1955

JERUSALEM, JORDAN

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

I am writing this under the impact of a sensation as far removed from realism as I have ever been—and further than I would have admitted, two months ago, I would ever be. Paradoxically, the sense of unreality comes precisely from the fact that we are sitting here on the exact nerve center of the problem that has commanded our energies and abilities for these twelve years. One entire wall of our room is glass enclosed, leading out on a lovely balcony and across that balcony I can practically see into the windows of houses in Israeli Jerusalem. Tonight, at a large reception, I met people who used to cross this tiny area and go to their homes. Tonight they can only look—and remember.

It is utter nonsense to argue whose fault it is they are here—and not there. The fact that the show-case glass separates the candy from the child is not changed by the further fact that there is disagreement over the name of the glazier who put in the glass. The candy over there once belonged to these people who are now here.

This is only my first day in this fantastically romantic city. There is much about it that is not for me. I am affected as negatively by the ostentatious potentates of Christianity as I am by the ostentatious members

of my own profession. But—on both counts—these are the scavengers on great, pulsating memories and majestic monuments which testify everywhere here to the tremendous spiritual dynamism out of which our civilization was born. Here—three thousand years ago and tomorrow are a single unit of time. In one place, at the base of the Dome of the Rock, excavations were going on to build a new highway to Bethlehem. As the bulldozers cleared the way, a "new" segment of an old wall was unearthed. And now, the modern road-building detours a bit while this spot is safeguarded against damage until competent archaeologists arrive to determine whether or not the "new" ancient wall may be a part of the original Temple.

There have always been money-changers here—and they are here now. But there have been prophets also, and they are still here. And those of the past are still here also.

But this is not of what I would write tonight. There are two chapters in my account that I have not had time to write until now.

They are of some experiences in Syria and particularly with the Jews in both Lebanon and Syria.

My time in Syria was, unfortunately, reduced by the only two days of illness either of us has experienced out here. And, peculiarly, despite all the medicines for, and precautions against, gastronomic ills which often bother Americans, what did me dirt was nothing more heroic than a case of good old American flu. The Syrian medical profession—of which I retained a very pleasant and competent member—is about as unruffled by this ailment as our own medicos at home. And the cure here is the now ubiquitous penicillin which had me up and around in pretty good time. But something like 48 hours did cut a slice out of my time for Damascus and I am sorry because what I did see of the city recommended more.

Perhaps the culmination of the working part of my visit there—and something of a personal tribute, if I may say so—was an invitation to speak for about ten minutes on the Syrian broadcast to Israel. The people in the United States Information Service were delighted that I was invited. I said I was not sure I should accept, since this is a Government radio and—as I had said over and over again in these Arab countries—I am not an Arab. But I was assured by the Director that I could say anything I wanted and, on that condition, I accepted.

I stressed the fact that I had met many people of good will in the Arab states; that the big irritant in the Arab-Israeli problem was Zionism; that Mr. Dulles had found and reported the same thing and that this was also, essentially, the position of the Council. I wrote out—and read—the statement to be precise.

I suppose it was not a very wise thing to do ten days before we are supposed to go to Israel—but it was a genuine offer and I felt it was entitled to a genuine acceptance. It would not be fair to lecture the Arabs—as I have done—that Israel is a reality; that Zionism is something else; that there are American Jews who are prepared to stand on these convictions—and then, when offered an opportunity, to back away from saying these things to Israelis. So—I done it! I am sure the Zionists will try to make something of it, but this will be no novelty.

I met the Prime Minister of Syria and the Minister of Information and Propaganda. I also met a number of the most important Moslem and

Christian religious leaders. These were all fascinating meetings. One of the Moslem leaders, after hearing our views about Judaism, said something which Hays Solis-Cohen* and Irving Reichert** and others have often said. He expressed very great regret that the Zionist state had adopted the religious name "Israel." "This makes it difficult for me," he said, "when I read the Koran."

I told him that we Jews experienced the same difficulty when we recited many of our prayers.

I mention this —one of many interesting exchanges of ideas—because I think it reflects the very great sensitivity to many aspects of this problem which prevails widely here. And to very many more people than our own membership, what we are trying to do makes the greatest amount of sense.

But let me tell you something of the Jews I found in Lebanon and in Syria, before this letter grows too long.

There are approximately 8,000 in Lebanon. Most of them live in Beirut. They are happy, prosperous and have some of the finest institutions I have seen—even including some at home. There are three schools. Two of them are rather large. One is a very small school run on the principles of the strictest kind of Orthodox Judaism. There is a lovely synagogue in Beirut and I have some pictures—inside and out—which I hope will turn out well.

They have *absolutely* no problems—*as Jews.* It is a wealthy, secure community. They regard Charles Malik as a great statesman—an impression I throw in because I am unable to suppress a sense of amusement remembering the campaigns at home which seek to draw lines and break down communications between Arabs and Jews. Here again, it is crystal clear that some of these "Arabs" are Jews; and some Jews are Arabs. The irresponsible efforts to separate the two at home are simply unrelated to the facts of life. Like so much that goes on in American organizations of Jews today, this is sheer, run-of-the-mill propaganda and I am glad we have not been victimized or intimidated by it.

I am sure there will be those at home who will have an answer to the fact that in talking to the Jews of Beirut, some of them expressed great satisfaction because I told them a few of us regard Malik—and some other Arab diplomats and statesmen—as men of substantial caliber. But I don't know what the answer would be unless there are private pipe-lines carrying the revelation that Arab Jews are no longer Jews. Then, by the prevailing definitions of Judaism, which say we are not Jews because we are not Zionists, maybe the popular logic would follow. But this is too complicated for my feeble mind, so I talk to these people here and admire their deep loyalty to their own countries; their immersion in Arabic culture and the steadfastness and dignity with which they carry their Judaism. Would that the pattern were as clear back in "civilization"!

And there is another perfectly amazing story about Lebanon—one of these "anti-Semitic" Arab states. There are *3,000* Jewish "refugees" from Syria and Iraq living there. They are all very prosperous. I put "refugees"

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* National vice-President of the American Council for Judaism.

** Honorary vice-President of the American Council for Judaism and Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Emanu-El, San Francisco, Cal.

in quotes because they really are not that at all. They are people with considerable means because they usually had large holdings in Beirut which is a major trading center for the northern Arab states. When things became tense and confused in Syria and Iraq following the Palestine war, these people found it easy to transfer their residences. The Lebanese government accepted them without *any* difficulty. Isn't this a story for the books! And will someone tell me why none of the "objective" organizations of the great and wise American Jewish community—you'll pardon the word—has ever reported this fact? By Israeli standards, this should have cost American Jews a minimum of $9,000,000. (I remember, I think, reading some place that $3,000 was a bare minimum to take in and establish a refugee in Israel.) But not only did it not cost them a cent—or perhaps *because* it did not—we are fed the shoddy Zionist lies that there is bitter hatred of Jews in the Arab states. Compare this with the Israeli attitude toward Arab refugees and put it in anyone's pipe of objectivity and justice—and practice of Judaism—and see what kind of smoke comes out!

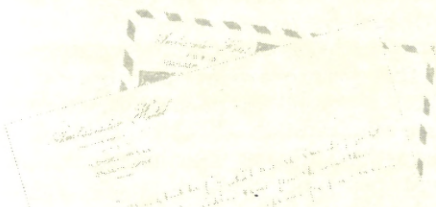
And these are Jews with pride and dignity! I told them of our Philanthropic Fund and—without making any commitments—asked if they were handicapped by lack of funds. Shades of Elmer Berger telling the people in Dallas twelve years ago the Council had more money than it could spend! The President of the community explained that they needed no financial assistance.

Their funds are raised in a system of which I do not approve, but it is a part of the pattern of the Orient. Taxes are levied upon all religious communities—by the leaders of the communities themselves—and enough money is raised in this way Maybe, at that, we should import some of these Arab Jews to America!

It is fascinating to sit with these men, some of them wearing the typical fez; some of them called Pasha; all of them speaking Arabic, some of them English and/or French and hearing them insist—with vehemence—that they are *Arabs*. They always refer to themselves—when talking to a Westerner—as "Arab" or "Oriental" Jews.

In Syria the situation is somewhat different, but that will have to keep for another time. I'm off to bed after a tough day.

As ever,
Elmer



May 23, 1955
JERUSALEM, JORDAN

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

I must finish writing you of the talks I had with the Damascus Jews or else I shall never catch up with myself.

There are between 5,000 and 6,000 Jews in Syria. A little less than half live in Damascus and less than half in Aleppo—with the balance (1,000) in other cities.

There were four Jews present at our meeting. Again—as with all of these conversations—this one was privately arranged. A very good American friend of mine invited us all to his home. There were no Government people present.

One of these men was a dentist and one was a kind of wholesaler or commissioner. I am sorry I cannot remember their names and I seem to have misplaced their cards. The Chairman of the Damascus Jewish community was present. He is a director of the Commercial Bank in Damascus. His name is Sabri Leniado—only some of our "wise" American Jews would never be able to guess it from his card—which I do have—because it is all written out *in Arabic!* The other is a lawyer by the name of Youssef Romano.

I was intrigued, during the hour or so of conversation, by watching the dentist twirling and fingering a kind of rosary. This is a string of amber beads called a *Masbahah.* You see them everywhere in the Arab lands—used by Moslems and Christians and apparently also by Jews. The point again is that this is an *Arabic* custom. Each religious group integrates the custom into its *own* faith in a way to reflect its *own* religious principles. Romano, the lawyer, was wearing a fez. If there was ever confirmation needed of our contention of integration; or that it is sheer stupidity to split Arabs and Jews on the anvil of Israeli politics, Youssef Romano with his fez and my dentist friend with his *Masbahah* provide it.

Also in the same vein I must tell you that before Romano left he gave Ruth his card on which he wrote a personal note of affectionate greeting to "My very good friend Farid Zeineddine," Syrian Ambassador to the United States.

When I think of the "researchers" pouring over Dr. Zeineddine's dossier and the amount of ink spilled on good white paper to prove that Arabs cannot possibly have any use for Jews, I cannot suppress the temptation to offer this little gem of a refutation written on nothing larger than a calling card.

Well—to return to the more general facts of the situation in Syria.

The Aleppo community is well off. Aleppo is Syria's largest city and greatest commercial center. Damascus, like Washington, is the capital and outstandingly beautiful. But there is only a limited amount of commercial life with which Jews—particularly in these parts—have been identified for centuries. This total figure of 5,000 or 6,000 is about half of what was the Jewish population before 1948. The greatest exodus came from the wealthier group in Aleppo and from the less prosperous group in Damascus. The latter exodus is not attributable, entirely, to the Palestine problem. Since business opportunities in Damascus have always been limited, there has been a steady decline in the Jewish population which was, according to the four Jews I saw, accelerated by the 1948 situation. Only about 200 of the 6,000 who have left since 1948 are believed to have gone to Israel. The largest number in a single group appear to have gone to Lebanon, as I indicated in my letter the other day. The next largest group migrated to South American countries where there are large concentrations of Syrians and Lebanese. A number have gone to France because of the close cultural affinity produced by the French occupation and mandate. Others have gone to Italy and North Africa.

During the Palestine war there was no serious trouble in Damascus. There was one bad incident in Aleppo. It occurred in 1947 at the time of the U. N. Partition recommendation. A group of Jewish kids started to march through the streets shouting "33 to 13!"—the vote by which the U. N. recommended partition. This, after a while, started a street brawl which grew into a serious condition. Several people—Jews and Moslems—were killed and two synagogues were burned. The next day a sufficient force of Government troops was brought in and the disorder was ended. No one knows if the kids who started the demonstration were Zionist stooges, or not. In any event, in the perspective of the whole problem, the President of the Jewish community told me it was not regarded as a decisive incident although for 24 hours Aleppo was tense.

During the Shishekly regime in 1953-54, conditions were bad. But these men stressed this had nothing to do with the Palestine problem; that the Christians of Syria had suffered setbacks also during this period of dictatorship and intense nationalism. It is interesting, I think, that these people living here see their problems in a more healthy perspective than the "statesmen" among the Jews who look at them from the United States. These people here distinguish between deep-seated, malicious discrimination against Jews and the normal and painful struggles of a country to win independence and then to govern itself in its freedom. The tendency—and even sometimes the willingness—of American organizations to confuse the two can complicate the lives of these people. Who are we to say how much these Jews should be prepared to endure to advance with these countries from colonialism to independence and freedom!

To make it clear to the Syrian Government, even in the face of the distress caused by Shishekly, that they repudiated the Zionist Messiah complex to save all Jews by taking them to Israel, a delegation of Jewish leaders—mostly from Aleppo—presented a petition to the present Prime Minister last year, asking for full restoration of their rights and "denouncing the whole idea of a Jewish homeland or a Jewish State"—their exact words.

Many of the legal steps necessary for this equalization of their status have been taken. Some actual restrictions still remain. I gathered, for example, that legally Jews are required to give the country the same stint of military service as Moslems and Christians. But registration for such service is not yet, on any appreciable scale, actually followed by induction into the Army.

The Damascus community is poor. About one-fourth of the families require supplementary financial aid in addition to what the employed members of families are able to earn. This aid amounts to about 1½ Syrian pounds a week (about 45 cents). There are about 1,300 individuals involved and the community spends approximately $500 a week on such supplementary relief.

In addition there are two schools supported by the community. I should say that by our standards these schools appear to provide about a fifth-grade education upon completion. Exceptional students, whose families cannot afford it themselves, are then provided with scholarships for still higher education. But there are very few so privileged.

This is almost entirely the fault of the Jews themselves. The country is rapidly developing a good public school system and has a fine, national

university. These are not only available to all citizens, but the Government is attempting to persuade all the religious communities (which in typical Oriental pattern had their own school systems) to send all children to the public schools.

The Christian school system (which was better than either the Moslem or Jewish) is rapidly being abandoned in favor of the public schools. There is some resistance among the more Orthodox Moslems. But progress is being made in the younger generation. Only the Jews refuse to cooperate at all. As a compromise, Syrian educational officials supervise their schools and the standards are reported to be those of the other public schools. But the Government really disapproves of sectarian education.

In any event, this group could use financial help. They are even eager to have it. I did not have an opportunity to discuss the problem with any officials of the Government because I saw these Jews the last day I was in Syria. It is possible the Government would be favorable, although the entire climate of the country at the moment is very anti-American. But if we were interested in helping, I would know how to pursue the inquiries through official channels, both in the Government and in the Damascus Jewish community.

I think this brings me up to the present and our visit here in Jerusalem. The situation here is sheer fantasy—except that it is real.

But one notices *little* things, even before beginning to probe the big problems. For example, it has been the *Jordanians* who have built a high stone wall all down the length of one of the principal streets here in the Old City. We can see this wall from our hotel room. Just beyond the wall are a few hundred feet of "no-man's land." Then you can see the traffic move on one of the larger streets in the New City.

Before this wall was built by the *Jordanians,* Israeli snipers would shoot across the no-man's land at traffic moving on this large street in the Old City. So the Jordanians erected the wall to make the street safe and to reduce "incidents."

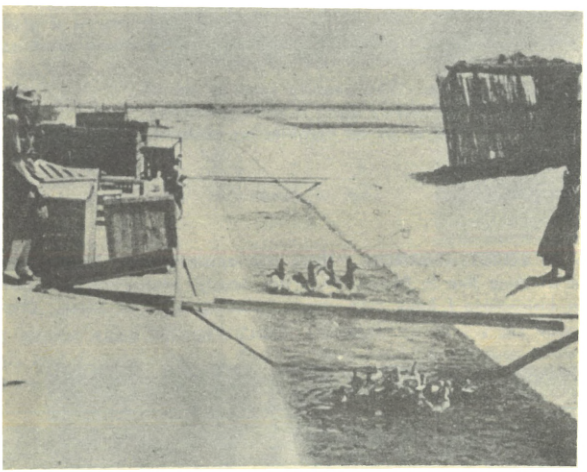
There is just no argument about these physical facts and what they indicate in relation to the geography of the area. There are no walls erected along the Israeli road to protect it from Arab Legion snipers!

The whole situation here is almost indescribable—but I shall leave it for another time as we are about to leave for some of the refugee camps and border villages. Tonight at 5:30 I have an appointment with General Burns whom I met briefly on Saturday. This, by the way, is already Monday morning.

Best to all. Elmer

P. S. Thanks to Buddie for his letter. And my sympathies to all of you for all the complications of the Council's work. I wish all of you could share this experience for it is out here where all the forces we deal with converge and then backwash into our lives. I'll explain later—but just think of the tourists who come here, to this city, by the hundreds of thousands and ask yourselves whether the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League are doing anything substantial about what must be one of the chief sources of misunderstanding in the minds of those who return after seeing what problems have been created here by the "Jewish" State.

THE MEHALLAH KEBIR MILL. (Worker's housing in background). *"I saw a tremendous textile plant at a city called Mehallah . . . It is an excellently equipped plant employing 15,000 people and managed by one of the most dynamic men I have ever met."*

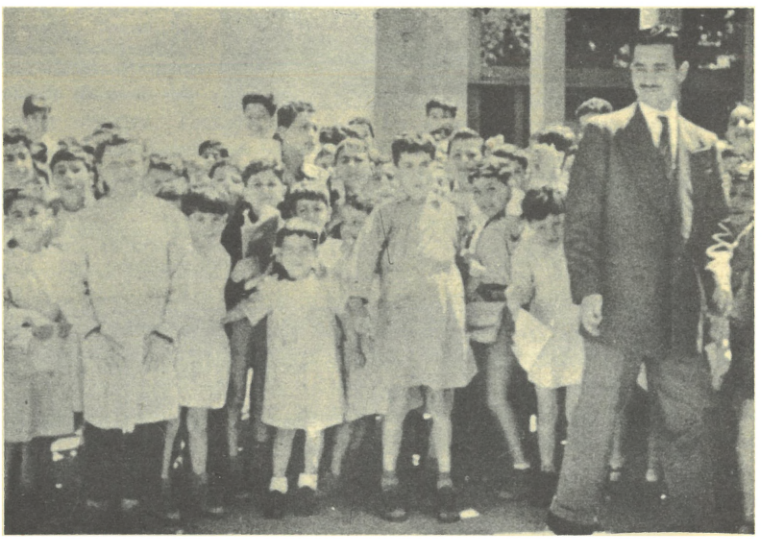


PRIZE GEESE AT LIBERATION POINT. *"There were Strasbourg geese brought in for experimental purposes in the hope that Egypt might be able to produce some of that wonderful paté . . ."*

ADMINISTRATION BUILDINGS, LIBERATION PROVINCE, EGYPT. *"The amazing aspect of all this—to me—is that Egypt is managing it all herself. There are no 'philanthropic' campaigns in other countries to finance this immense development."*

LOW-COST HOUSING NEAR BAGHDAD, IRAQ. *"This country reminds me of whatever our own West must have been like a century ago. It is lusty, bustling . . . It is spending about $150,000,000 a year of its oil royalties on economic and social development."*

JEWISH SCHOOL IN BEIRUT, LEBANON. *"There are approximately 8,000 (Jews) in Lebanon. Most of them live in Beirut. They are happy, prosperous and have some of the finest institutions I have seen—even including some at home. There are three schools . . ."*



SYNAGOGUE IN BEIRUT, LEBANON. *"There is a synagogue in Beirut . . . They have absolutely no problems—as Jews. It is a wealthy, secure community . . ."*

CHIEF RABBI SASSOON KHEDDOURY, OF IRAQ. *". . . this was a dress he had designed himself and wore proudly; and when he walked on the streets of Baghdad or drove in his car it was a source of respect accorded to him as to all religious leaders in the country."*

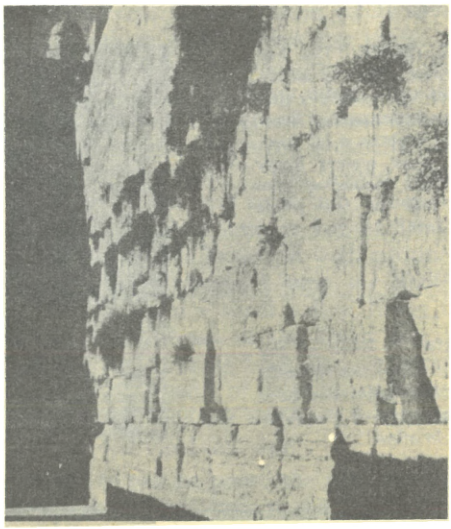
BEIT JEBRIN ARAB REFUGEE CAMP, JORDAN. *"I do not see how these people can talk as calmly and dispassionately as they do. How would you answer when a young father asks you: 'Are we not also human and deserving, at least, of what is ours—not more?' "*

DHEISHEH ARAB REFUGEE CAMP, JORDAN. *". . . people walk about eight miles to a patch of thorn bush which they pull out and carry back to the camp to supplement for fuel. You can imagine how this burns!"*

ROAD NEAR NAZARETH. *". . . we saw the longest camel caravan anywhere in the Middle East on the road leading out of Nazareth . . . in Israel."*

ARAB REFUGEE CAMP, JORDAN. *"A large—bad—tin and concrete hut camp—population 30,000. This place is 1300 feet below sea level and hotter than the hinges of hell, even last Monday, which is still spring here."*

A MAABARAH (TRANSIENT CAMP) IN ISRAEL. *"You wonder why, with an average of about $50,000,000 a year from American Jews and with pretty fancy buildings going up for the Foreign Ministry . . . these people are left to live as they do . . . Maybe this is a 'showcase' for reluctant contributors to the United Jewish Appeal."*



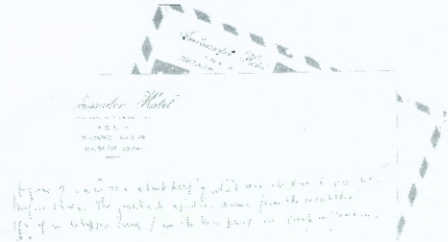
THE WAILING WALL, JORDAN. *"I noticed an old man praying. The creation of his 'Jewish' State prevents him from going to the Old City shrines . . . one of the endless paradoxes and ironies of this tense little area."*

MT. ZION PARK, ISRAEL. *". . . rather attractive; although I must say it reminded me a little of sections of Central Park where there is more dust than green and where too many people are crowded into the landscape . . ."*

HAIFA, ISRAEL. *"Haifa . . . is a beautiful city . . . It is the only city in Israel that has public transportation on Saturday . . . Mapai has complete control locally and so does what it wants."*

KIBBUTZ, ISRAEL. *"The 'better' kibbutz really is better. It is clean and colorfully gardened and commands a beautiful view high on a hill overlooking these always lovely and always somewhat mysterious hills of the whole Middle East."*

NAHALLIN. *"I stood on the very spot where the Nahallin incident took place and have the topography of the country well in mind."*



May 23, 1955

JERUSALEM, JORDAN

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

After two hours of tossing and turning I am unable to sleep tonight. We spent seven hours today in UNRWA land rovers, seeing refugee camps and border villages. I am profoundly, humiliatingly—perhaps unforgettably—ashamed of being a Jew. I say this in full control of my mind and aware of the fact that I am still emotionally shocked at what I have seen.

The monumental stature of the appalling tragedy that has scattered nearly 500,000 human beings along these "borders" is incomprehensible and defies reduction to writing. There are no words—at least within my capacity—to describe what we have experienced. I can, I think, relate some of the facts. How they will come through to you without the vision of haunting eyes, of abject, inert, utter hopelessness and despair, which we looked at for seven hours, I do not know. You cannot know what it means to sit in a camp council, as we did, and have what is left of human beings ask you, "Why? Why did you Jews who were so victimized yourselves do this now to us who are sitting with you in this room?" You cannot know what it is to stoop over double to enter a mud hut and see a baby sleeping while its mother—after seven years—sits on the floor with as vacant a face as that on some of the statues of antiquity we have looked at with curiosity in other places in this part of the world. You will never, I hope, see 30,000 of these remnants of human beings crowded into a small valley, living in mud huts in the lowest spot on earth—at the head of the Dead Sea at Jericho. You will never, I hope, see a woman trekking back from an eight-mile hike where she has had to go to gather a bundle of dried thorn bushes in order to have fuel to cook the scavenged garbage she will have for herself and her four children and husband as their one meal that day.

I could continue with feeble attempts to put on paper the pictures that are racing through my mind. But they add, perhaps, little to the information of anyone who will read this. And even as I am torn to shreds emotionally, I know that the problems cannot be solved in this context. It was precisely this kind of emotional approach to the Jewish refugee problem which the Zionists made and which precipitated here, in this part of the world, a solution so fantastically and irresponsibly illogical that no human can imagine it. It must be seen to believe rational minds conceived it. Surely—here at least—truth is stranger than fiction!

Of some of the things I have seen today I have pictures. Others I shall have to try to describe although I have rarely felt at such a loss for words.

At any rate, let me fall back on a more or less chronological account, as the simplest way to restore some kind of order to my thinking. If I repeat, here and there, it will be because I am too tired and spent to sort out the evidence by subject.

The trip was planned and supervised by the "area officer" of UNRWA for the Hebron area of Jordan. This man is a refugee himself and a perfectly

wonderful person. His name—just to confuse you about "Arabs"—is Henry Knesevich.

We began the trip after I finished my letter to you this morning at 7:30. Days begin early here and it is brilliantly bright at 5:00 o'clock.

The first thing we did was to sit down with a map and plan how we would travel. The decision was made by selecting typical samples of the various kinds of refugee settlements. These included the following:

(1) A border village—population (before 1948) 3,000
(2) A "good" tent camp—population 900
(3) A "bad" tent camp—population 5,000
(4) A border village under siege
(5) A large—bad—tin and concrete hut camp—population 30,000

I shall try now to describe the situation in all of these as well as I remember them.

(1) This village is called *Beit Safafa*. It is perhaps a 20-minute drive from Bethlehem. Before the armistice it was a fifteen-minute walk to Jerusalem (new City)—or really a suburb. You stand in what is left of the village in Jordan and look into Israeli Jerusalem in one direction and, in another direction, to the old lands of these villagers where the Israelis are building apartment houses for new immigrants. Now—of course—the New City is cut off completely and it is a forty-minute drive to the Old City since the crazy armistice lines have necessitated new roads that skirt these fantastic divisions where if, in some places, you stumble on a stone you fall into another country.

About 2,000 of the former inhabitants of Beit Safafa are now in Israel. The other 1,000 are in Jordan. The armistice line here was drawn based on the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv railroad which was given to Israel, since most of it ran in what became Israeli territory after the Armistice. Actually, when the fighting stopped, Arab legion troops controlled the territory but in order not to make the railroad completely useless, they agreed to withdraw. Then a line was drawn 200 yards from the railroad tracks into Jordan. The Israelis insisted on this for protection of the roadbed. This line now divides the houses of the village from its former lands.

I think you know that the usual pattern of settlement in this part of the world is for a village to build all its houses together in one place and then the lands which the villagers cultivate are all together some little distance away. This pattern goes back beyond Biblical times. Therefore when the wire was strung along here to mark the "boundary" 2,000 individuals had to decide whether to join their families and live in their houses; or to break from their families and houses and neighbors in order to cultivate the land and become "enemies" in different countries.

The result is that when we turned the corner and drove into the main street of the village, a barbed wire fence made it a dead end street.

On the side we entered were Arab kids and their families, staring across a mass of barbed wire (some places no higher than two feet and no wider than three or four strands) at another group of Arab kids and their families, on the other side of this "boundary." You have to see this to believe it. In places the wire is so close to the door of a hut or a shop that we had to

walk single file. At the most it is never more than a few yards from the houses nearest the line.

These groups of kids and adults were once living together as villagers. Some are of the same families. Some are playmates. All of them were neighbors and friends.

They are "officially" forbidden to talk across the wire; to exchange food or anything else. After seven years, the chief occupation for these bewildered people is to stand along this line and stare directly and dumbly into each other's faces.

There is naturally a Jordan patrol on the Jordan side and an Israeli patrol across the wire. Jordanian police accompanied us. On the Israeli side were two armed soldiers (National Guard) who sentried the line as a military duty in an army camp, with drawn guns.

Neither the Jordanian nor the Israeli inhabitants can really work this land any more, for what was essentially an agricultural settlement is now being transformed, in Israel, into a housing development for new immigrants —a "transition camp." So, the Arabs who elected to stay with their lands—in Israel—have neither the land to cultivate nor their houses and neighbors. And those who came to the Jordan side see their lands being "plowed under" to make way for newcomers. How much "rubbing it in" can a human being endure?

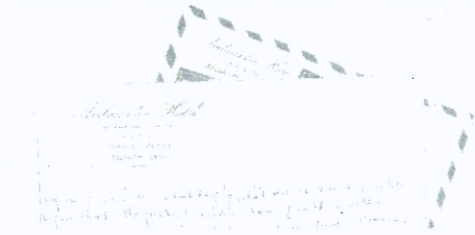
About two miles down this same road is a hospital left by the British. It has 200 (I think that is the figure mentioned although my memory could be wrong here) beds. It is badly needed for a TB hospital. Using the railroad again as the point of departure for drawing the line, the barbed wire came 15 *feet* from clearing the building into Jordan territory. In other words, all of the building but 15 feet is in Jordan. UNRWA has repeatedly asked the Israeli authorities to cede these fifteen feet and offered a compensatory 15 feet at another point. The Israelis have refused. The hospital therefore stands empty, since neither side can use it.

The people on the Arab side of the village receive only half rations (average 700 calories a day) since their status as "refugees" is technically debatable because many of them still have their "homes." That they no longer have their lands or cattle—the source of their sustenance—is taken into consideration only to the extent of giving them half rations. These people therefore are considered "fortunate." There are about 17,000 out of 100,000 inhabitants in border villages, who are so "fortunate." The other 83,000, because of technicalities more complex than this, receive no rations at all. UNRWA admits that except for voluntary agency help, they would die of hunger. Most of the voluntary agency help is from Christian sources. I think again of the great "achievements" of the defense agencies at home as against this problem sitting out here, involving millions of people, with only Christians and Moslems doing anything constructive, while American Jews continue to dance Israeli political and economic tunes, at the same time being assured that "sentimental" support of Israel is just ducky—good for Jews, Judaism and America!

I am now, I think, utterly exhausted and shall try to sleep and finish this as soon as I can—perhaps with less turbulent emotions and some more coherent thoughts.

As ever,

Elmer



May 25, 1955
JERUSALEM, JORDAN

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

This is Wednesday morning. Yesterday we went on a day-long trip to Amman where I saw our Ambassador and other U. S. officials along with some of the people in the Jordanian Government.

The drive from here to Amman is spectacular for you go from the elevation of Jerusalem down to the Dead Sea—some 1,300 feet below sea-level—and through country where the very stark nakedness of sand, rock and mountain is mysteriously and insidiously beautiful. Coming back at sunset last night we rode through a myriad of changing colors which certainly elude descriptive words and which only a genius could paint.

Names in history roll by your car window and it is hard to believe you are traveling on a hard-surface road in a late model car as you see the hills of Moab, Jericho and the Dead Sea itself. Standing at the northern end of this body of water, you can look down the right-hand shore-line to a promontory where you are told the boundary of Israel cuts in and the eastern line of the Negev begins. So everywhere you turn out here "the problem" crosses your line of vision.

Amman—which a few years ago was a village—is now building feverishly, just as we saw the same kind of activity in other Arab countries.

But before I surrender to the temptation to write a travelogue, let me try to finish my letter of Monday and my reactions to the trip through the refugee camps and border villages. If I do not do that now, I have no idea when I shall manage it, because tomorrow we "pass over"—as they say here. The American Consul here, who is a first-rate guy, has found out we are on the list to be admitted and everything seems to be in order. We shall obtain special crossing permits so as not to have an Israeli visa in our passports.

I am really a little eager to go now that I have seen the rest of this part of the world. I shall try to be objective and to look at measurable things—for the ideology I know. All I can say is that if, as we are told, Israel is the most advanced state in the area, it must be quite a place, for although you could never guess it back home, we have seen some things that make for stiff competition.

And yet, it is impossible to forget the ideologies. Even as I say I will they come back on the front of the stage as I attempt to pick up my story of the refugees.

I shall give you a concrete example, not without relationship to the doubts I have expressed about the policy of the "defense" agencies in either ignoring this problem or—worse—becoming apologists for Israel.

This is a story involving Ruth—not me—and, incidentally, I have not given her nearly enough credit for the help she has been and for her patience in reviewing impressions with me before I firmed them up in my thinking.

Today, while I was busy with something else, she went to a small

school, run by a prominent family, to train young girls in handicrafts and modern house work and to keep them off the streets. At this school Ruth met a Mrs. Weaver of Omaha. She is recently widowed and active in civic and social affairs. After her husband died, she decided to take a trip to this part of the world. She knows and does civic work with a number of Jews in Omaha. One of them is named Madelaine (Ruth is not sure of the last name) who may be a Madelaine Silver of the Council. A number of Omaha Zionists attempted to convince her that Israel was just about everything there is to see out here and that Jordan would not be worth much time. Omaha Zionists wrote letters for her to all the Israeli brass. She came to Jordan "unheralded and unsung." She has now been here a month and is not sure how much longer she will stay. She still intends going to Israel. She is about as angry a woman as can be imagined, according to Ruth, at the deception passed off on Omaha citizens generally by Zionists there. She knew something of the Council from people here and at home and so Ruth's meeting her was a happy coincidence. She vows she is going back home in July and speak her piece. She asked Ruth to be sure to have the office send her Council material because she is interested in telling people she will meet here and at home that there are Jews who repudiate Zionism.

How much "anti-defamation" work does anyone think this chance meeting is worth—plus the long years we have labored to build a record and a reputation!

Well, now to the story of the refugee situation with example (2), the "good tent" camp.

(2) This is a small camp called *Beit Jebrin*. It is inhabited almost entirely by members of one tribe or family who were wealthy landowners in Palestine and are now completely expropriated. It is a good "tent" camp, which means all (900) live in tents that are in fair shape and are surrounded (each tent) with a wall about three feet high which keeps out rain and mud in the winter season. Otherwise, the water rushes in beneath the tent flaps and washes out the floor and perhaps the blankets and anything else which may be on the floor, which is about the only possible place to put anything. UNRWA furnishes the tents; one every two years and one every time a family reaches the number of eight individuals. If there are less than eight all sleep, eat and carry on all the business of living in a tent about twenty feet square.

Despite enormous difficulties, it is surprising to see what some of these people can do with the little they have. The three-feet high walls, in many tents, are "whitewashed" with the pale blue coloring commonly used out here because it cuts down glare from the sun and looks cooler. Here and there you find a picture, or perhaps a religious symbol (if the inhabitant is a Christian) cut out of a magazine and pasted on the wall to add a "cheerful" note. Many of the women do embroidery--and some of it is very beautiful. One woman makes artificial flowers out of scraps of paper.

It simply is not true that these people are lacking in either skills or initiative. If these things can be done—after seven years—in a refugee camp they speak well for the grit and ability and character of these people.

The tribal leader, or chief, is keeping up the tribal tradition and still feels responsible for these people. He uses his tribal influence to obtain

extra funds (very small) for he has already used up any personal capital he was able to extricate from territory now held by Israel.

We were invited by the leaders to come to the camp headquarters—a large tent perhaps fifty feet square—to have coffee and talk. I hesitated to do so, for feeling is high in these places and while we had armed police with us and so I was not so much afraid of any physical harm, I did not want to provoke, or help provoke, an incident even by chance. We were assured that the invitation meant we were welcome as friends and so we went. I have pictures of the meeting, if they come out well.

I do not see how these people can talk as calmly and dispassionately as they do. I was asked about the Council and about American opinion in general. I gave the usual answer about Americans—Jews and others—who did not understand the problem and who had been moved only by humanitarian considerations in the years from 1943-1948. How would you—or anyone reading this letter—answer when a young father, handsome, well-dressed for all his poverty, asks you: "But do they not know *now*, after seven years? And if they are humanitarians, are we not also human and deserving, at least, of what is ours—not more?"

Sitting there, for half an hour, the difference between a tribal Judaism and a universal one hits you between the eyes with every word. Why do we not help these people—even a little? Are we, after all, intimidated by Zionist tribalism? Can we not make it possible that a father and mother and a son and his wife, for example, may not have to sleep each night in the same tent; so the son and his wife may not have to hurry to have children to have a tent of their own?

Is not *our* Judaism as universalistic in its outlook as the religion of the Christians who are working out here with refugees—Moslems and Christians—giving clothing and other help without the old-time suspicions about missionaries? Is our religion *really* a potential force for good—*in the world?* Do we have to ask if a man prays in Hebrew or lived in a ghetto to share with him our acknowledged tradition of charity? Haven't *we*—we of the Council—said "charity is the same as justice"? And isn't it justice to give a blanket, a tent, a yard of cloth or clothing to people who need them—even if the State of Israel looks upon them with suspicion?

Good God!—are there answers to these questions which are humane? I could not think of them. All I could think of was how ashamed I was for *any* regard we have ever had for the sensibilities of Zionists; or the vacillation of Zionist-indoctrinated non-Zionists. I say to you, friends and people with whom I am honored to be associated, that *Judaism* is on trial out here; and Jews too. And the judges are *not* only these poor refugees but are business people of all nationalities; government officials of many countries; simple tourists from the four corners of the earth. All of these do not stop and haggle over the legalities and the proprieties of governmental action needed to *solve* the problem. They just *see* the problem and find no rationalizations good enough.

I should like—desperately—to see the Council listed in the next UN pamphlet reporting on this situation, as one of the voluntary agencies helping to make this situation at least a little less grotesque and tragic than it is.

I know that the answer is not simple. *Only we* are doing anything about the problem, *as Jews* and I suppose we cannot destroy what little we do by going too fast. But time is running out and the good-looking, strong-minded Arab father who asked these questions cannot for much longer be impressed with my appeal for patience.

(3) This is the worst camp we saw. It is called *Dheisheh* and is near Bethlehem. There are 5,000 inhabitants, living on a rocky hill-side in a tangle of mud huts, tents and stone or concrete shanties. They have absolutely no means of support but UNRWA rations and a few jobs which UNRWA can give to a few people; milk distributor, who earns 28 cents a week; petrol distributor for fuel for cooking (1½ litres a month) admitted by UNRWA to be inadequate so that people walk about eight miles to a patch of thorn bush which they pull out and carry back to the camp to supplement for fuel. You can imagine how this burns!

The day we visited the camp was the first day of the feast following Ramadan which, you know, is a month-long fast and which ends with a holiday of general rejoicing and feasting. There was nothing for these people except—if they were lucky—a piece of cheap candy. Ruth and I gave the UNRWA man a much-too-small check to be able to buy at least enough candy or a little something else for everyone.

Here, too, we were invited to talk to the camp council. The spirit here is much worse than at Beit Jebrin, for the camp is worse. The UNRWA people admit communism is rife and know the leaders who are paid an average of 50 cents a month by the party, even though the party is illegal.

The atmosphere here was less friendly, although there was no semblance of violence. I heard America cursed. These people know—probably from Communist sources—that the United Jewish Appeal gives Israel millions every year and that Israeli "refugees" are budgeted at around $3,000 a year per family while they here receive seven cents a day. Here, very nice distinctions between Jews and Zionists made little impression. Here I was faced with the same question: "If you are Jews, why don't you do for us Moslems, who have been oppressed by Zionists, as we Moslems did for Jews when the Christians persecuted them five centuries ago?" How would you answer, after you had explained that we believed in a *universal* faith and were different from Zionism which pursued a political pattern? How would you advise a man, who had rotted seven years on a stinking hillside, to have more patience and perhaps the light would dawn on enough people so that if these refugees could not go home, they might at least have the elementals of life? What would you say to a man, in such a condition, who asked you if Communism could be worse; and why should he care for America's interest in the cold war when four miles away was the "powerful" nation that now kept him from his home?

I confess I did a bad job of answering. But these people are more civilized than I. Despite my feeble answers to their questions, they thanked me for coming and lined up to shake my hand when we left.

(4) This place is perhaps the most revealing of all the refugee settlements we visited. It is a village on the border called *Wadi Fukin.* The name rang a bell in my memory and as the story unfolded, I knew why.

Wadi, you may know, means "spring" or "water hole." Wadi Fukin is one of three main spring areas in Jordan—close to the Israeli border. Wadi

Fukin is also close to Nahallin and I stood on the very spot where the Nahallin incident took place and have the topography of the country well in mind.

Wadi Fukin was a village of 350 people, farming 11,000 dunams of land. Now 9,000 dunams are in Israel; 2,000 are still in Jordan. But of the 2,000 remaining in Jordan 1,600 dunams are rocky hillside, suitable for goats or sheep grazing but absolutely unusable for farming. The village is built along a hillside. The crest of a row of hills above the houses is the "boundary."

I stood and saw with my own eyes how, since 1952 according to the UNRWA man, Israelis have raided over the crest of the hill and, one by one, demolished the houses. The village is under a state of constant siege and systematic demolition. The objective, of course, is the water or spring which is still in Jordan.

Now, during the day, the villagers come to work the 400 cultivable dunams left them. By night they travel a few kilometers to Nahallin or another village. They are afraid to stay in Wadi Fukin after dark. This may explain the raid on Nahallin. The Israelis would like to chase the villagers out of the area altogether.

There is a national guard post (Jordanian) at Wadi Fukin. The nearest regular Army post (Arab Legion) is beyond Nahallin. This is in accordance with the armistice agreement prohibiting regular army posts within a certain distance of the line.

Monday night we had cocktails with General Burns at Government House and I asked him what he knew of Wadi Fukin and whether my UNRWA informant had given me the right impression. Burns is a quiet, honest and sincere man. He must be very careful of what he says for he is trying to do a good job in an almost impossible situation.

I shall give his reply as nearly in his words as I can remember.

"The situation is certainly amenable to that kind of an interpretation (the one given me by the UNRWA man). I have had no incidents at Wadi Fukin since taking command. But we know that the nearest Israeli village is inhabited by an almost 100% Herut population and we know the Herut is just about the same as the old Irgun."

I said I saw the place of the Nahallin incident. There is an Israeli Army post at the top of this same row of hills above Wadi Fukin. Nahallin is six kilometers from this point. About half-way between the crest of the hills and Nahallin is a track—rather than a road—and a smaller track branches off, down another hill to the village. Mines were put on the small road, leading into the village and then about 40 jeeps, probably with an average of five soldiers in each, went to the village. The Jordanian National Guard phoned the Arab Legion post which is a couple of miles away. The Legion came and two vehicles were blown up by the mines, killing two soldiers. Six civilians, as I remember the number, were shot in the village and then the Israeli force, estimated at 200, retreated back over the hill. Speculation is that the Israelis hoped to have another situation like Kibya but the plan misfired and so the Israelis fled.

(5) I shall not detail this fifth site because I think I can finish this and put it in the mail. I shall say only that it is like (3) except it houses

30,000 people from 141 villages; and that it is so close to the Dead Sea you can spit from one to the other. This place, as you know, is 1,300 feet below sea level and hotter than the hinges of hell, even last Monday, which is still spring here. Of course, it is warm and dry in winter.

There are many, many other things I should write but it is perhaps better to finish this while I can and to save the rest for when I get to Rome, which I hope will be Tuesday afternoon.

Lessing, many thanks for your thoughtful letter. Both Ruth and I much appreciate your writing. I could not devoutly wish for anything more now than a chance to discuss with some of you what we might do with the information I have. I do not know the answer myself. But I hope we can find a proper and dignified way to use this information to help penetrate the iron curtain with which Zionist propaganda has cut off American Jews from a broad perspective and the objective facts about this area of the world.

I do not—in saying this—pre-judge Israel. It may be everything its most ardent worshippers claim. This I hope to be able to evaluate during the next week. But regardless of what we find in Israel, it is patently clear that Zionism has done *all the American people* a distinct disservice in its incessant efforts to picture the rest of the Middle East as "backward" and "inferior." This simply is not true and I hope we shall find the ways and means of saying it is not true.

I return, as you know, July 18. Give me a few days to catch my breath and I shall be glad to go anywhere, to sit leisurely and to discuss the problem and to add much which I have not been able to write.

I shall take one more moment, even though the car is waiting to take me for an appointment, to tell you all another story. I have met here a man named Stewart Perowne. He has been in the Middle East, in the British Government service in one capacity or another, for 25 years. Part of the time he served in Palestine during the Mandate; and for a period of his service he was in Baghdad—I think in the early forties.

At the present time he is retired from the Foreign Service but is the Secretary of the Anglican Bishop here. He was interested in my impressions of Iraqi Jews today. I told him much of what I have written you both previously.

Then he told me that about 1943 he had come from Baghdad to Jerusalem to tell the British High Commissioner to intercede with Ben-Gurion and other Zionist leaders because he was convinced that if the extreme Zionist position were maintained, Jews in Iraq would be in trouble. He was finally sent to Pinhus Ruttenberg who said to him: "We know the danger. This will be the contribution of Baghdad Jewry."

I firmly believe, as of this minute, and admitting not to have heard the Israeli side, that if there is a God in heaven either Israel will mightily change its attitude, or it cannot survive in this atmosphere of intense suspicion, fear and hatred. And since this may be my last letter for now from an Arab state I add, to the credit of the Arabs, they are prepared to accept the first alternative if it is offered.

Best to all from both of us—and thanks again to Lessing for the letter.

Elmer

May 26, 1955

JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

This is the end of our first day—or rather, half-day—in Israel. We crossed at the Mandelbaum Gate at 2:00 P.M. This "Gate" is a rather interesting phenomenon itself—and so symbolic of the situation here. Mandelbaum Gate is a "crossing point" a few hundred yards down a street that was originally just a common, ordinary roadway in Jersualem before the war in 1948. It ran from the Old City to the New. Now, at a place where there is a house in which formerly a man by the name of Mandelbaum lived, is a little hut in which there are Jordanian police. The house was shot up in the fighting and has been abandoned. Beyond the Jordanian police hut are another few hundred yards of "no-man's" land. You do not cross this stretch without adequate notification having been given on both sides. At the end of the "no-man's" land is another little hut where the Israeli police check you in or out.

Our American Vice-Consul in Jerusalem, Jordan, drove us over in a big red Consular station wagon—and I must say it is a relaxing way to travel these few feet. Both Ruth and I were very grateful for the favor.

But I am running ahead of my story. Actually, but for a strong sense of duty, a certain amount of stubbornness and a feeling that I would be misunderstood, I would never have passed the Israeli crossing point. I must emphasize that this feeling developed *after* I walked into the Israeli police hut—*not before;* and here is the story.

I had spent most of the morning obtaining a regular form on which to put the Israeli visa so as not to invalidate our passports for future use in the Arab countries should we return. The Jordan officials were more than helpful. One came from his home to put on the Jordanian exit permit. When we reached the Israeli check point, although this practice is common here, I carefully explained to the Israeli immigration officer that I wanted the visas on these crossing permits—not in the passports. Ruth was waiting outside with the Vice-Consul, in the station wagon. Foolishly, I looked away for a second and the Israeli visaed my passport.

I leave it to you to imagine I used some reasonably strong—and clear—language. There was a good deal of servile apologizing and I did save Ruth's passport. I am convinced the "mistake" was on purpose because more visas are put on these crossing permits here than in passports.

It is not a very important incident but it is typical of that kind of a "cute" sense of humor which I have never appreciated.

Anyhow, we decided to go on—in no very good temper. Before I was finished in the immigration hut, a "travel agent" met us. He wanted to drive us to the hotel. The Consul had said that as long as we and our baggage were bedded down in his car he might as well take us on through to the hotel. I readily accepted.

The Israeli was very annoyed and kept reminding me that I would have to pay for the car in which he had come to meet us whether I used it or not. Since I had at no time indicated I would not pay, I suspected something more than an interest in a few Israeli pounds. In any event, it was a great feeling of comfort for Ruth and me to drive up to the King David in the unmistakable red station wagon with the unmistakable license plates and I do not hesitate to confess I was sorry to see it go.

And now—some nine hours later—I am just hoping you will believe that I am making the most strenuous effort to report to you honestly and objectively. The strongest motivation for doing so is that the situation out here does not call for any distortion of the Israeli position. That is to say—in my mind—the beauty of the Arab countries, the lack of any desire on their part for another war, the pathetic picture of the refugees, the unmistakable, emergent strengths of the Arab nations require no minimizing of Israel. Israel could be all that every Zionist press agent has ever claimed—and it would still not justify a "favored nation" treatment or the claim that it is the only democratic hope in the area. I am glad we went to the Arab States first. Whatever my personal uneasiness at being here, I am completely relaxed about what I can be shown.

But as the following account will indicate, the Israelis are not as relaxed as I about what I may see or to whom I may talk. I feel sorry for them. They do not understand us personally (or the Council)—or the Arabs—or, I am afraid, the United States.

But I shall let you judge for yourselves on the basis of specific incidents.

We were not at the hotel more than 20 minutes before a Mr. Shimshon Arad from the Foreign Office called. The interesting part of all this is that we are here about four days ahead of schedule. It is obvious that Mr. Mendelsohn, the "travel agent" lost no time in calling the Foreign Office while we were upstairs seeing that our baggage was put in our room.

Ten minutes after the call, Mr. Arad was here. He is a very nice young fellow, English educated, of the Eban type. He asked me what I wanted to do and whom I wanted to see. Mr. Mendelsohn was present all the time and—unsolicited—kept offering advice.

I told Arad that I was particularly interested in the political phases of the problems in the Middle East and in the Jewish Agency heads here, to whom I would try to put honest questions regarding our interest in Zionist activity in the United States. He finally agreed I would see Walter Eytan, Director General of the Foreign Ministry. The appointment is now made for Sunday morning.

When I kept asking for appointments with the Jewish Agency people, Mr. Arad began to explain to me how "besieged" Israel is and that the problem of infiltration was threatening their security. The only answer they have, since they have lost faith in "peaceful" procedures, is the policy of "retaliation." This is now apparently the established line and while Mr.

Arad is not a particularly key individual, from all that I learned in an honest effort to get at the facts, I might have been sitting at a United Jewish Appeal dinner in New York—if I ever went to a United Jewish Appeal dinner.

Mr. Arad—obviously—is not interested in knowing anything of the moderate Arab position; or, at least, he does not want me to be too impressed with it. I was pretty frank about telling him that banging up the borders in retaliation for "infiltration" was hardly the way to convince the Arabs Israel wanted peace; or to make friends in the United States.

But I kept coming back to my basic interest in the *Zionist* character of Israel, rather than in the specifics of the border problem. I asked if I might see Locker,* Dobkin,* and people of that status. When Arad saw that I was unimpressed with his lecture about Israel's insecurity (in reply to my suggestion that Israel had the best army in the area he replied, "Of course we are not worried about a second round *now*") he steered me off the Jewish Agency personnel by saying he had no influence with them and anyway, any conversation *I* might have with such people would end only in an argument.

An argument *about Zionism* seems to be as *verboten* here as in the United States. I tried to explain to him that arguments about Zionism were hardly a novelty in my life but he was unimpressed. I cannot help thinking of all the *official* refusals of the American Zionists to debate publicly with us.

So—I have settled for the talk with Mr. Eytan and I only want you to know that I have *tried* to see the people here who might have authoritative answers. I did not ask to see people who had answers with which I would agree.

After this sparring had gone on for a time, Mr. Mendelsohn shifted gears and from "spot" interruptions swung into a high-gear diversion. He suggested I might see Jewish Agency people who deal with economic and cultural problems, so I settled for that.

Since I am a Rabbi, he opined, he was sure I would be interested in the religious life in Jerusalem. He proposed a tour of the synagogues in order to see how the Yemenites, the Iraqi, Chassidim, and others worship. This is a three-hour jaunt—all on foot—in which I had very little interest. I happen to know how the Yemenites, the Chassidim, and the Iraqis worship—better than Mr. Mendelsohn, who kept repeating much too often and vehemently that he is only a "business man" and knows "nothing about politics."

By this time the pattern was becoming clear and I decided discretion is the better part of valor. Here, a noticeable number of Zionists run around the streets carrying real, shiny guns—out where they glint in the sun!

So, we agreed to a tour of the Old Quarter and were hurried off to the Israeli tourist office, but not before I was told I could not take a camera along. This—by the way—is the first time this request had been denied, except in two places in the Jordan border villages.

In the Israeli tourist office we were "integrated" with a group of American Zionists from New York and (Buddie, take note)—Chicago. The latter are definitely not prospects for the Council.

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* Jewish Agency officials.

There followed a 10-minute briefing of what we were about to see. I shall try to recapitulate but it will not be easy.

It resembled a mixture of the "humor" of George Jessel and the best "scare the hell out of them" sales talk of the Anti-Defamation League.

It goes something like this. (Forgive the quotes. They are only reasonably accurate.)

"What you are about to see is only one of the wonders of Israel. Here in this new country, only seven years old (everyone here is conveniently forgetting that the Balfour Declaration started this almost forty years ago), we have assembled your brethren from all over the world. (Accurate quote now.) Here we do not say there are *four* corners of the earth. Here, judging by the different groups we are making into a nation, we believe there are *eight* corners. (Laughter—from everyone in the audience but two and you have only 1/20th of a second to identify them to win the jackpot on this quiz show.) I shall not describe Ruth's and my reactions.

(Resume approximate quotes)—"In a few minutes you will be transported back thousands of years to see how our brethren prayed in the Yemen when we came to rescue them. Then we are going to see how our brethren prayed in Poland—only there they did it with embarrassment. Here you will see how proud and upright they pray."

This is then "dramatically" illustrated by a sample chant from the briefing expert who is either a *Chazan* who has discovered how to make a few bucks on the side; or is a tourist expert after a frustrating effort to be a *Chazan*. The one chant is weak and wailing. The other is strong and vibrant. I suspect different sized tonsils trained to the pink for the several pitches. At this point I am wondering—since the lecture is taxing slightly less than my mental capacity—if this is the stuff which fires all the three-day "experts" on Israel.

After ten minutes of this, we were taken to a Persian synagogue. I am genuinely sorry to say that it is a drab place—with no beautiful architecture, stained-glass windows or historic value. The only element of significance is that—in a way—it resembles a mosque and there are traces of Persian influence here and there which, it seems to me, proves *my* point rather than the Israelis'. Since the audience would probably not have appreciated this fine point, I restrained myself beyond a stage whisper pointing this out to Ruth.

I waited to see—as advertised in the tourist office—how the "Persian" Jews prayed but since *no* one was praying, this obviously became an impossibility.

It soon developed, however, why we were brought to this particular place. We were told that if we looked out a certain window, we could see where seven years ago, a "miracle" saved Jerusalem, during the Palestine War—here called "The War of Liberation." There followed the story of Tova Goldberg who, according to report, was a seventeen year old girl, who fought at an outpost indicated from the window. The Arabs were spotted moving for an attack. If this point had been lost, all Jerusalem would have fallen. There were no communications, and the regular Haganah force was 300 yards away. The Arab shelling started. Tova said, "Let me take the message." O.K. She started off. An Arab shell hit

her arm in which the message was being carried and severed her arm. She ran on f. about 20 yards and then realized she had lost the message. She came back, picked up the severed part of her "arm"—(in quotes because this is exactly what the guide said)—and carried the message to Garcia. Result—Jerusalem is saved and now Tova is married to a "hero" who lost both his legs in the War of Liberation.

Well—now—I ask you!

Similar "background" was supplied at other synagogues. I point out—if necessary—that the trick of using Judaism (even in its curious and quaint forms as practiced here in some places) for purposes of propaganda is not unknown in the "homeland."

I am, seriously, very unhappy about all this. Not only is there no dignity in the way this tour is conducted, but there is a kind of commercial cynicism in pointing these people out as "curios" of the State.

I do not happen to accept—for myself—the way they worship. But leave them alone. Some of them have been here since long before Ben-Gurion and the Biltmore Platform openly called for a "Jewish" State. So have the decency not to claim the State was established in order to make it possible for them to pray "without embarrassment."

No word is ever said—in all this tour—that many of these people regard *this* State as blasphemy; or that they feel no allegiance to it.

In one street we saw the low wall of bricks stretched across the street to prevent any traffic since it was approaching sundown and tomorrow is *Sh'vuoth.* I knew what it was, but I think Ruth did not; or maybe she did and just wanted to draw out this guide. So she asked him. He stuttered for a second and then admitted it was because the people in this quarter "wanted to be sure the holiday was properly observed."

You are not supposed to ask the next question of why a stone barricade is necessary in a "Jewish" State so that one segment of the population can "properly" observe a holiday.

The answer, of course, is apparent when you come back to the rest of the city. Here too, the holiday is observed. But here it is a *national*—not a religious—holiday. The town is awake—like any city on a Saturday night—and although the religious bloc has enough strength to prevent any public transportation, tomorrow will be a "humdinger."

Since we have a private car for the five days we shall be here, we shall be able to travel. I have not written here any of my impressions of the physical character of the New City because tomorrow we shall see some of the agricultural, as well as some of the urban, developments and so I think I shall combine the two.

I am—at the moment—disappointed. Although I am trying to retain an open mind, I am sure no one here will be cooperative in helping me see people. I certainly expected no red carpet and I told Harman before I left New York that I did not expect Sharett to meet me. But I am afraid these next four days will be wasted and I suspect the same reluctance here to talk about *fundamentals*—not buildings or flowers in the desert—as we find among Zionists and their sympathizers in the United States.

So—to bed—with no handsprings either in my head or my heart over my first nine hours or so of being "ingathered."

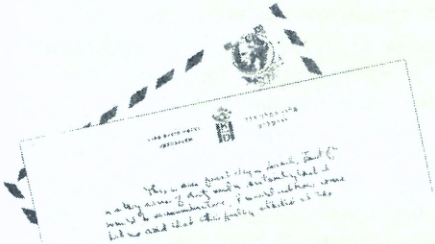
I hope you will not feel I am trying to be facetious. I had the choice of treating this experience lightly or writing in something of the temper I really feel. I have decided not to dignify the situation to all of you by expressing the latter feeling.

Perhaps tomorrow will be better and if it is I shall be the first to say so.

Ruth's and my own very best to Edith, Lil and both of you.

Cordially,

Elmer



May 27, 1955

JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

Well, there is one significant fact about this day. I have "celebrated" my birthday here.

Beyond that, the day was divided into two parts. I shall polish off the easier of the two first. For any purposes of authoritative information or helpful exchange of ideas, today has been as futile as yesterday. Mr. Arad had promised to call at noon, after he had a chance to contact some of the people I asked to see. I know it is a holiday—and tomorrow is Saturday when official offices close—but I must say even in view of these considerations Mr. Arad is being singularly unproductive. In the first place he did not call until 6:00 p.m. Then he said he had been unable to find "anyone at all available."

I do not know what "available" means in this context but—there it is. I reminded him we would be here Sunday (which is a working day) and that Tel Aviv and Haifa are not so far away; and since I was more interested in talking to people than sight-seeing, I would be glad to change our schedule to meet anyone's convenience.

More I think I cannot do and Mr. Arad said, quite officiously, he would "make a mental note of this."

So, the entire day was spent seeing the physical accomplishments of this part of the State. Perhaps that is just as well—even though they are not something of great interest to me for I have never questioned them—because this is what everyone talks of upon return. In order therefore to have, at least, a small amount of common meeting ground, it is perhaps good that we spent this day seeing the sights.

The travel agency man was here at 9:00 this morning. We have a car and a driver for the next four days. The driver is obviously well briefed on us. But he is, on the whole, pleasant. He also "knows nothing of politics."

We went first to Mt. Zion where, allegedly, David's tomb is to be found.

You climb a very considerable number of stairs and enter a park which

is rather attractive; although I must say it reminded me a little of sections of Central Park where there is more dust than green and where too many people are crowded into the landscape to feel you are escaping the city streets. Most of the occupants of benches and the customers at the ice-cream purveyors were obviously "Oriental" Jews. I asked our chauffeur-guide about this. He admitted the "Baghdadi Jews"—as they call them here—had taken the place over, apparently because of a religious attachment to the holy site of the tomb that is greater than any attachment felt by the western Jews.

"Not many of us come here any more," he concluded.

It is a small point, but I did notice many of the people sitting in the dust and on the sidewalks—just as one sees them often in Cairo or Baghdad. I intend no evaluation here. The whole point is that this is a Middle East custom. I was not shocked by it—or led to interpret it as "degeneration" in Iraq or Egypt; and I do not so interpret it here. What I cannot tolerate is the attitude—already creeping through to us from the Israelis we have met—that they are "Western" and all of these "Oriental" practices are unknown here. My guess would be—percentage-wise—that as many "Arab Jews" prefer sitting cross-legged in the dust or on the sidewalk *in Israel* as other Arabs prefer the same posture anywhere "East of Suez."

Anyhow, from the rather pleasant park we entered the ante-way to the tomb and finally the tomb itself. It is an incredibly smelly place where thousands upon thousands of candles are lighted and the tallow just runs wild over the floors and down the walls.

Here again—in this "Western" State—the oriental flavor is noticeable. For lighting candles at the tombs of "saints" is certainly not typical of Judaism in the west. In fact, this seems to be a practice borrowed more from the oriental Christians than from the Moslems.

When I expressed some surprise at the really oppressive odor and heat and the veritable seas of tallow, our chauffeur-guide again blamed the conditions on "Iraqi Jews."

At the very door of the tomb itself, in a dimly lighted dungeon, hundreds of people were sitting chanting from the Psalms or reading other religious texts supposedly related to David. The press of people was suffocating. The trip through the Shrine is without any direction or order and you have the feeling of being in a New York subway at five o'clock on a work day.

While I am not, by nature, unduly impressed with religious shrines unless there is some architectural or artistic interest I must say this was exceptionally disappointing.

There is a museum here—which we did not go to see—in which some of the soap is preserved as it was found in Germany, having been made from the Jews who were tragically killed.

I have wondered at this kind of a museum. I thought *here* Jews were supposed to learn to live "normal" lives—free of obsessions with Hitler and anti-Semitism. But I see none of it after a day-and-a-half. There is a nervousness and a defensiveness about these people. They are either explaining their policy of retaliation because the "Arabs" dislike them; or apologizing for their dependency on American Jews because they have to save Jews from here, there or the other place; or, as all day today, they

are explaining that I shall not see many people working because it is a holiday. I knew it was a holiday and did not ask why no one was working.

It is pretty evident that these people are not the healthy, outgoing, normal people we have been told a "Jewish" State would produce. They are hyper-sensitive to all the complexes which are at work in their lives; not the least of which is their guilt-feeling about the Arab refugees and knowledge of their dependency on American charity.

On Mt. Zion, as one climbs the stairs, are passages from the Psalms—the Songs of Ascent—inscribed either in stone or on cheap enamel signs. In many places election placards are posted over these. Ben-Gurion's picture is most prominent. He is expected to pull Sharett through the coming elections and undoubtedly will.

But here I think I had better depart a little from a chronological account and speak of my more general impression of the physical and modern construction. If I do not do this, I am afraid people will think I am unconditionally prejudiced and, believe me, I have never in my life tried so hard to bend over backward. What I have written so far is a sober, accurate picture of what we have seen—in the order in which we saw these things.

I shall now break the order to prove that I am prepared to give credit where credit is due. None of the industrial plants is open today or tomorrow so we shall be unable to see any of them before Sunday. But we have seen some housing and a couple of *kibbutzim*.

There is no doubt that the housing in Jerusalem is impressive—numerically. There are many lovely streets and trees. It must be noted, however, that some of the loveliest of these sections were built by, and belonged to, Arabs before 1948. The business section is closed for the holiday but there are a good many fair looking small shops. I cannot say anything about the available merchandise because they are closed. There is a nice little cafe right in the heart of the city which has been open today and which is a delight to Ruth because they serve Italian *espresso* coffee.

The King David Hotel is a disappointment. This may be because I expected more. But it is faintly on the seedy side. During the war, at home, because of the crowded travel conditions we were often unable to stay at first-class hotels. The King David reminds me of some of the alternatives.

The bell-hops and waiters are either largely Arabs or "Arab" Jews. They are all pleasant and the service is good.

There is a lovely garden behind the hotel and our room looks out toward the Old City. In a somewhat pathetic way, this morning I noticed an old man standing on a balcony of his room on the floor below ours, praying while facing the Old City. The creation of his "Jewish" State prevents him from going to the Old City shrines and realizing the very fulfillment of *his* pilgrimage even though Israel claims to have realized *his* Messianic fulfillment. I feel no such nostalgia myself since my Judaism does not embrace the same elements as his. But I felt sorry for him. He might not have thanked me, had he known and I am sure it never crossed his mind that if the Palestine problem had been resolved *our* way he could still have been standing at the foot of the Wailing Wall where—ironically—I was standing less than a week ago. This is just a little vignette out of the endless paradoxes and ironies with which this tense little area is saturated.

Near the hotel—not five minutes away—are the Knesseth building and the Jewish Agency building. Again, they are pleasant structures. I believe—though I am not sure—that the Jewish Agency has larger quarters than the Knesseth. If I am correct, this is yet another irony. I asked to see the inside of either but was told they were not open and they would not really interest me since they are "not unusual." Near the Knesseth building is the synagogue of Rabbi Herzog—the Chief Rabbi.

The Government is building new structures—completing the move from Tel Aviv which was made into temporary quarters. There is a very handsome Foreign Office building not yet completed and also under construction are new buildings for the Hebrew University since the old University and Hadassah Hospital are inaccessible on Mt. Scopus.

Having said all this, if it had not all been over-sold in the United States one could take it in stride. Actually, there is no hotel to compare with the St. Georges in Beirut; no boulevards to compare with those of Damascus; no bazaars like those of Cairo; no government building to compare with the gem of architecture where the Syrian Parliament meets.

And remembering that all of this has been built on charity and grants-in-aid, perhaps not so much should be expected. Yet, when you discuss costs of building or construction of streets and other public works, you are told it is irrelevant.

"Yes, costs are very high," they say. "In the first place the Histadruth controls all the construction industry through a complicated series of interlocking companies and unions."

"Anyhow," they add, "this is a partnership between us and the Jews of the world. The Jews of America have the money and we are here pioneering the work for the State which will revive Jewish life. Therefore you make a serious error evaluating costs in terms of *our* wealth and natural resources. And in terms of the wealth and natural resources of the *Jewish people* the costs here are not exorbitant; and anyway, they provide funds for the State."

Well, if you accept this logic, there is no answer. Sometimes I say, for the sake of argument, I will go along. Only then I cannot follow how they claim that 600,000 Jews have "sacrificed" so much to bring in another three-quarters of a million; or that Israel—itself—shows promise of economic independence. Or, I say that this line of reasoning does not warrant the arrogant and superior attitude the State takes either toward the Arabs or toward the Jews who think the America which makes all this possible is better. Then you are accused of not really having sympathy with the "aspirations of the Jewish people"; or, you are told "you do not understand *this* State."

When you ask why the Histadruth needs a $5,000,000 edifice which, except for the Y.M.C.A., will probably be the most impressive structure in the New City, you are told "Now we are a State and we must sacrifice to put an imposing and impressive face to the world."

So—"you call it tomayto and I call it tomahto." When the questioner asks how they can afford this or that, they admit they can't—alone—but that this is a common enterprise of "the Jewish people" which (I use the singular advisedly) can. When you point out to them that this "co-operative" endeavor might call for a different attitude or perhaps a different

use of the wealth, they are nervously in a hurry to declare their sovereignty and the need for all the appurtenances required to bolster the ego and morale of a basically insecure State.

You understand *why* they need Zionist political pressure at home; and *why* there is, every year, a new "crisis" for the United Jewish Appeal; and *why* despite UJA and Bond Sales imports outstrip exports by fantastic amounts; and *why* they took German reparations, though I believe there is a deep-seated and understandable hatred of Germany here and so a sense of guilt and shame at the new-found source of goods.

This is a State living far beyond its means. It is like the unregenerate spend-thrift who is always borrowing on the possibility of a big inheritance. So Israel is always in "good shape" because there will be oil in the Negev; or someone is going to open a new plant; or some just say that the State reflects a series of "miracles" and they expect them to continue.

Perhaps if Mr. Arad had been more successful, there would be somewhat more precise answers to the questions I ask. But it is no less significant that these are the views of the "little people" we are able to meet; the taxi-driver, the waiter who brings us morning coffee; the German-speaking maid at the hotel; the guy who runs the cigar counter in the lobby.

But let me return to the record in chronological order and describe some of the other places we saw.

From Mt. Zion—where we also saw the German Church of the Dormition —we went to a *kibbutz* which, I think, is called Ramat Rachel.

This, so we were informed, is an old *kibbutz*. It stands on a hill at the border and across the beautiful valley one can see Bethlehem. This *kibbutz* was the scene of a good deal of fighting in 1948. We could see the crazy border from the Israeli side—as we had seen it earlier from Jordan.

The principal building in the settlement has been repaired. But at the top of one wall a square space has been left—uncovered by the new stucco. I should say this space is perhaps two feet square. It is pockmarked with what we were told were bullet holes.

This was purposely pointed out to us, because otherwise I think you would not notice it.

Ruth asked about it and was told the square was left purposely as a memorial of the war. I must again confess this seemed a little grotesque and exaggerated to me—but there it is for them as likes it!

The *kibbutz* really disappointed me. Here, at least, I had expected to see "the pride of Israel." But this is a dismal, unkempt place. The fields are littered with tin cans and the skeletons of rusted and burned-out automobile chassis. We visited the communal mess hall which was really incredibly filthy.

We have been told this is not typical of the *kibbutzim*—so I shall wait until we see others which are reportedly better. This, I should say, left much to be desired.

We then went to a settlement of Yemenites. These people are put into an abandoned Arab village, we were told, because "They feel at home here and like it since this is the way they lived in the Yemen."

This is very probably so. But one wonders if the Yemenite Jews still "like it this way" after seeing new apartments with many modern conveniences. And anyway, another irony crosses your mind which makes satire a bit difficult to restrain because didn't we have "Operation Magic Carpet" to fly these people out of the "poverty and disease" of the Yemen to the modern miracle of Israel!

These Yemenite Jews are very dark—darker than most Arabs you will see anywhere in the area we visited. And in their mud hut villages, with their Arab dress, they might be living in any village outside of Cairo, Baghdad or Damascus.

The real reason for putting them in these places—as those less propaganda-conscious will tell you—is that they present a "color problem." They are as strange, foreign and unintegrated—and one may assume unintegratable —with the Jews from northern and eastern Europe as you would expect them to be. And again, if only we at home were not fed this fanciful propaganda about how everyone and everything here is transformed, one might look at this phenomenon and simply accept it as an understandable, sociological fact.

From the Yemenite village we went to a new, really impressive housing project. The whole top of a hill, outside of what was Jerusalem in 1948, has been transformed into a quite lovely settlement.

The physical labor involved must have been enormous—and the financial cost stupendous. But both are justified on two counts. First, the new houses—among the most attractive we have seen here because they are a little colorful and not the drab, production-line type—are for veterans of the "War of Liberation." Also, the settlement is now placed at this particular point for strategic, military reasons. It represents a kind of outpost—for either attack from, or defense of, Jerusalem.

I tried to learn the cost and to obtain some idea of the possibility of a return. I received the same, old answer. The Histadruth owns practically everything in this settlement. "The cost is not important in terms of the honor due our war veterans and the needs of the State."

I am sorry therefore if my acknowledgment of the best construction yet seen is somewhat diluted by this infuriating refusal to look at the balance in the check-book. I suppose it would be a feat to grow lettuce on Fifth Avenue. But it certainly diminishes the dimensions of the "miracle" if first you knock down the Empire State Building, plow the ground, draw in water from a Westchester reservoir—and *then*—just pass the bills on to your Uncle George with the attitude that *you* have performed the miracle and *he* ought to be glad and proud to pay any amount. And, while not minimizing taking off half a hill and building houses, piping water and planting gardens, I say this is only *half* the story. The other half is the attitude here that the Jews of the world *want* partnership in this nation-building and the question —unanswered by the Jews of the world—whether they *do* regard themselves as co-nationals with these people or whether what they give is charity for "refugees."

In the limbo of that unanswered question is the *only* possible way to judge this place for no normal economic or national rules apply.

On another hill, we were shown the National Cemetery, and Herzl's monument—now a national shrine. In the cemetery there is one burial

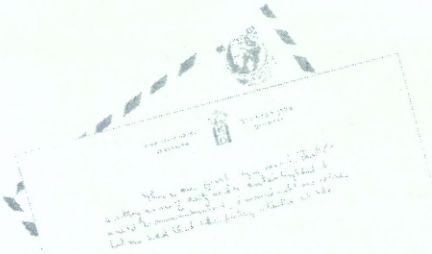
place for 140 Haganah sailors. This common grave is designed like the deck of a ship, with the graves submerged in water. Ample American Zionists were around keeping the water level high with tears which I simply cannot comprehend.

Finally, after lunch, when I had not heard from Mr. Arad I contacted Dr. Ernst Simon, one of the Ichud group still following Dr. Magnes'* philosophy of peaceful living with the Arabs.

But the story of that conversation is so interesting—at least to me—I had better not try to write it now for I am a bit weary. I will, however, manage it early tomorrow morning before we start out on more sight-seeing. In many ways, I think the opinions of these *Israelis* will confirm many of my observations for any who believe I may have been incapable of accurate reporting.

Best to all.

As ever,
Elmer



May 28, 1955

JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

It is 5:30 A.M. But it is easy to wake up early in this part of the world. The air is so pure and the light so brilliant that last week one day, across the border in the Old City, there was enough light by my light meter to take a picture with Kodachrome film at 4:30 in the morning.

And before we start off today, I want to write you of my talk yesterday afternoon with Rabbi Benjamin, Dr. Strauss and Dr. Simon of the Ichud group. I have another date with them this afternoon and if anything more develops beyond what I write now, I shall send it along later.

These people are the salt of the earth. Rabbi Benjamin is a prophet who might well fill Magnes' shoes if he were not some 77 years old. As it is, he is the titular head of the group and the man largely responsible for the courageous little publication *Ner* (Light) which they put out with as great regularity as funds and energies permit. Simon and Strauss are academicians. The latter has just written for *Ner* a comprehensive article suggesting how Israel might proceed to establish both a climate and a basis for negotiation for peace with the Arab States.

All of these men are German Jews, religious, philosophical Zionists who see the tragedy and immorality of Israel's internal and external policies

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* Judah L. Magnes, first president of the Hebrew University, an American Zionist who envisioned a bi-national (Jewish-Arab) state in Palestine and who hoped, until his death in 1948, to achieve a rapprochement between Zionists and Arabs.

toward the Arabs. The Government—in my opinion—puts up with them because they are old, have no money, and no demonstrable political influence.

This does not seem to bother them very much. They are motivated by a monumental sense of faith in the right and justice and are confident of the eventual victory of their viewpoint. They feel they are having increased success as a ferment in other groups which *are* politically powerful. Whether or not this is so is difficult for me to tell. But you do not have to count the contents of ballot boxes to realize these people are the conscience of Judaism in this country.

The hour and a half I visited with them yesterday afternoon—from any substantial viewpoint—is the only worthwhile time I have spent in these two days in Israel. I know the Government knows of the meeting and I hope it involves no danger to them—or to us. At least we both—they and we—knew the Government knew and we met with our eyes open.

I suggested the possibility of help from us. They think it is impractical, on the political level; and they are also afraid their integrity would be questioned if they took help from outside. I shall have more to say of this when I return, but there seems to be no practical way of assisting them now.

Benjamin is frank to say there can be no peace here while Ben-Gurion is alive. The country certainly has the *political* machinery of freedom. But the machinery is so well lubricated by the economic stranglehold which the Histadruth maintains that the freedom offers little opportunity to test its fibre with a real challenge to Mapai. Ben-Gurion also adeptly feeds the "activist" spirit in his own and other parties and so, in addition to this economic control, he provides the psychology of "the strong man" who is closely linked to the military and who has never really renounced claims to "all of Palestine."

The Arab minority is still in very bad condition and the Ichud people are convinced this situation will continue until the refugee problem is solved. They feel the present attitude toward minorities here is obviously designed to impress upon the Arab refugees that they will not be happy if they elect to return. When the Government is convinced it has sold the Arab refugees on the imprudence of choosing repatriation, it will agree to the principle in the hope that few, if any, will subject themselves to what they know the present minority is enduring. Benjamin and Simon both see this design and suggest we distribute *Ner* to the Arab refugees. I told them I could make no commitments, but would suggest the idea when I return. Since their position is founded upon the ethics of the situation, it might well be a demonstration of Judaism in practice by means of which we could—in a small measure—match the kind of courage these men are displaying here.

The discrimination against Israeli Arabs takes a number of forms. The most flagrant and brazenly hostile is the continuing expropriation of "neglected" Arab lands and properties. There are, apparently, continuing cases where Arabs suddenly find they have lost every bit of security and so they immigrate to one of the neighboring Arab States—the majority going through Lebanon. These people, of course, provide fresh discouragement to those refugees still hoping to return.

Military governors have just about complete authority in the heavily

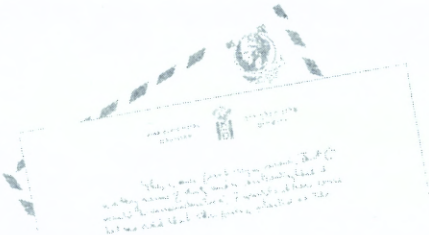
populated Arab districts around Nazareth and—of course as we saw for ourselves—in settlements along or near the borders. It is difficult for an Arab in these areas to move freely from one place to another *within* Israel. Although Mr. Mendelsohn—the "travel" agent and business man who "knows nothing of politics"—is strenuously trying to persuade us not to visit Nazareth and Tiberias, I am pretty determined to go and perhaps we may be able to see something of all this for ourselves.

In any event, I shall see the Ichud people again this afternoon and let you know if anything more of interest transpires.

Today is to be another of sight-seeing. Mr. Arad has promised to call again with the latest report on my "non-existent" appointments. But it is a beautiful day by now (6:30 A.M.) and I am resigned to letting come what may.

As ever,

Elmer



May 28, 1955

JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

Things are picking up—in a way. This day has run the gamut from peacefully writing you early this morning, through a whole series of small but interesting experiences until now—nearly midnight—when I had better try to put this down because tomorrow we leave for Haifa at the start of a fairly hectic 48 hours before we take off for Rome on Tuesday morning.

Our chauffeur-guide has intrigued me during all of these past two and a half days. I have been sure that he reports our coming and going and perhaps any chance remarks we may make to each other in the car. At the same time, beginning yesterday afternoon, he began cautiously to be critical of the Government here in response to some of my questions. I suspect he is trying to win my confidence just to see what he can learn. If it is a game, I am able to play it and play it we did for most of the day.

This morning, soon after we started out, I said quite frankly that the boundary question here in the city of Jerusalem was untenable. I said I knew he was "non-political" and precisely because of that I was interested in his feeling about what might happen.

"Well," he replied, "I will only say it won't stay as it is."

On our way to see a better *kibbutz* than we saw yesterday, he stopped on a road running on the crest of a hill and pointed across a valley to another row of hills where a village was easily to be seen.

"That," he said pointing to the village, "is Deir Yesin."

"I know about Deir Yesin," I told him, "and I wonder if you know that massacre was one of the acts here which brought serious condemnation to Zionism."

"The trouble with all of you in America," he said, "is that you do not

understand the situation here. Deir Yesin is the only thing the Arabs understand."

The "better" *kibbutz* really *is* better. It is about ten miles from Jerusalem. It is clean and colorfully gardened and commands a beautiful view high on a hill overlooking these always beautiful and always somewhat mysterious hills of the whole Middle East.

But the conception of the *kibbutz*—generally—is something else again and I am a little mystified at the average ecstasy with which so many Americans return to report about them. For a *kibbutz* is the purest distillation of the "welfare State." Or, perhaps to be a little more precise, it is pure Marxism—*I do not mean Soviet Communism.*

A *kibbutz* is entirely—stringently—"cooperative," which is the word used here to describe it. No one owns a single piece of property or has a smidge of personal possessions. Even the problems of clothing are handled on a communal basis although I do not mean to imply all are dressed in some kind of a uniform. But a man may have a new suit or a woman a new dress only if it is decided everyone can have the same. You enter the *kibbutz,* economically speaking, pure as the driven snow—and you leave it any time you wish with the same economic purity.

According to our chauffeur, 300,000 people now live in *kibbutzim* of one kind or another—the various political and ideological groups having *kibbutzim* of their own. You are required only to work. There is no need for individual initiative and all your wants are supplied—provided the *kibbutz* can afford to provide the things to everyone else.

The children are raised on a communal basis. In this *kibbutz* the nurseries and children's dormitories seemed pleasant and clean and the attendants—all professionals and steeped in the ideology of the party controlling the particular settlement (this one was Mapai)—seemed highly competent.

This being Saturday, parents were free to spend time with their children and so very few were in the children's quarters. But except for such periods on Saturdays and holidays and a few minutes in the evenings of other days, the children are raised collectively without family life. They go to school until they are 14 and are trained in the ways of the *kibbutz.* Then they go to work.

They are good-looking kids. But as you wonder about the spirit and attitudes behind the housing and public buildings in Jerusalem, so you wonder about the spirit and attitudes behind these good-looking faces and bodies. Is it enough to be able to say—as we are told here, "Look how strong and straight they are and compare with what their forefathers were in the ghetto"?

Here again, you detect the profounder truth that these people are anything but "normal" or else they would avoid these self-conscious exhibitions trying to prove that in Israel they are breeding some kind of a superior, physical type of Jew.

But more disturbing are indications of what is beneath the blond hair and fair complexions. This being Saturday and this particular *kibbutz* being wealthy enough to own a rather large-sized truck, the young people were just in the process of piling into it to go off—so our guide said—for a picnic

at the seashore near Tel Aviv. Generously sprinkled in the crowd of perhaps fifty kids—boys and girls—were a number of 15- and 16-year-old boys carrying automatic rifles strapped over their shoulders. We saw others tramping through the surrounding woods, similarly armed.

I asked the driver why. For "guarding purposes" was his answer, although this particular *kibbutz* was not near the border. These young men are regarded as paragons of the State.

Ruth made the "mistake"—consciously—of asking where the synagogue was. The answer was, "These people are not religious." Here you have "Jewishness" at its purest distillation in this State; no family in a responsible sense, no faith, no personal treasures or possessions.

The State and the Party are all-consuming. And at least some portion of the State's image is reflected in these armed children who are given rifles as their badges of authority and superiority.

So have the People of the Book become the people of the Bren Gun and the hand grenade; and the place of Zion, from whence shall go forth the law, is an armory whence goeth forth, at the discretion of an adolescent, hot lead and the smell of powder.

Ruth and I are wet blankets in all this, since we do not burst our respective vest buttons comparing these swaggering, armed boys with what they may have been in the ghettoes of Warsaw. Perhaps this is our lack. But I do not like Sawdust Caesars—here or anywhere else.

We returned to the hotel around noon and there was my usual report of "no progress" from Mr. Arad. But he suggested we have tea with him in the afternoon, since we shall be leaving Jerusalem before lunch tomorrow. I agreed, setting the time to allow for my second conversation with Rabbi Benjamin, Dr. Simon and Dr. Strauss.

Then I said, frankly, to our chauffeur that I was bored with sightseeing and bored with the King David Hotel. I asked whether he had any suggestions for something of interest during our last—and I do mean last—evening in Jerusalem. He suggested a movie and, although I am not an ardent fan even in New York, I agreed. Then I, in turn, suggested dinner some place other than the hotel and I further suggested that he and his wife be our guests for both events. After some mild protestation he accepted.

I then went for my appointment at Dr. Strauss' apartment which is not too far from here—near the Jewish Agency building. I spent another hour and a half with Benjamin and Strauss. Simon could not come today.

Again I was impressed that these are brave, magnificent people. They are—for me—a little too naive, believing, that without much more than a little ink on paper, right will triumph in this age of super-expensive propaganda. But my admiration for them is boundless.

Benjamin has a perfectly marvelous sense of humor. He says we are not really anti-Zionist, and that there is only one anti-Zionist in the world—"Ben-Gurion." He has dedicated his life to showing up the present Government for the cynical, immoral force he believes it to be. He told us a little of the difficulties he has with official censorship which, apparently, is more serious than we had imagined. He says he will regret it if the Arabs renounce the principle of repatriation. "They will," he said, "in that case be no better than accomplices after the fact of the immoral leadership of Israel."

The tragedy of this man's life is that he is 77 years old. But he would like to come to America. He and I agreed that the solution to this problem —if there is one—is among the Jews of the United States. But they do not know the truth any more than—according to him—the people here know the truth.

It would be a good idea to bring Benjamin over and perhaps we should consider it when I return. There is the practical difficulty that he speaks English only poorly, but to hear him echo the spirit of Magnes in this place is to sit at the feet of a man of majestic proportions. All the risk, the anger, the futility of coming here is offset by this experience.

Benjamin is actively and outspokenly much more in favor of attempting to work out a way in which we might help in their educational efforts. But Strauss shares Simon's feelings that it would be unwise. We left it at that, since I am in no position now to come to any firm agreements anyhow.

I left them reluctantly knowing I had just experienced, in dramatic and moving fashion, a living example of the fact that what brings men together in comradeship are ideas and spirit and values which transcend houses and gardens and labels of all kinds. With these Israeli *Jews*—yes—I *do* have a bond. Talking in different tongues, we spoke the same language. With *these* Israelis—leave alone their faith—I *do* have a bond as an American, for their ideas are the same as the best of our own country. When *they* say "democracy" we know what we are talking about. And when they say "Judaism"—even though we know we practice it differently—we still know what we are talking about.

Nothing I have seen here—and nothing I have learned in my twelve years of study of this problem—has so dramatically pointed up the fact that there is no Zionist "peoplehood" of Jews. For close as I feel to these three very great men, just so far away am I from the "smart" little Mr. Arad, the "unpolitical" Mr. Mendelsohn and the "innocent" Israeli immigration officer I met when we first "passed over."

My tea with Mr. Arad followed. It was something less than inspiring—perhaps to him as well as to me. We have established an "armed truce" without ever having agreed there was a war and I am satisfied to let it go this way.

He apologized all over again for his inability to make any contacts for me. He said he would still let me know in Haifa tomorrow night if something could be arranged.

The only detail which may be of some slight interest came up at a point in the conversation which reminded me very much of the talk I had with Mr. Harman before we left New York, as I remember it. I was trying to explain to Arad that we were not opposed to Israel and as a result of my visit to the Arab countries I was convinced, if Israel *wanted* peace, one prior condition to obtaining it would be to end the Messianic, Zionist character of the State. I said I thought both Mr. Dulles, and Mr. Byroade had implied the same thing in very high policy statements.

There was a lot of fulminating that these were ideas of *internal* significance to the "Jewish people" and therefore improper areas for pronouncements by Americans charged with responsibility for American *foreign* affairs.

I told him—pretty directly—that this "line" was "kid stuff" and not to try

to argue with me on this basis but to save it for United Jewish Appeal dinners.

Then—as "they" so often do—he shifted ground and said that I felt this way because I had no sympathy for Jews in need while Israel had as its basic, motivating purpose the salvation of Jews who were distressed where they now lived.

This led us to the Jews of the Soviet Union and Iron Curtain countries. I had no sooner mentioned this than he interrupted, and said, "This just proves you are more concerned with what others think about you than you are about saving Jews who need saving."

I asked him how he came to that conclusion.

"You are worried that Israel will become a communist state and so reflect seriously on your status in the United States."

Then I told him he had me all wrong. I said we of the Council, in a degree absolutely unmatched by any other organization of Jews in the world, had no reason to be concerned about the political coloration of Israel; that *precisely* because we separated Israel from ourselves both *religiously* and *nationally* we could afford to be more respectful of its sovereignty.

I added that I *would* be distressed to see Israel turn Communist—but as an *American,* quite apart from my religion and as *any* American today would be distressed to see *any* country subverted to a way of life we believed to be at war with our own.

But then I added that this was not really the point I had intended to make before he had interrupted me; and I thought this was not Mr. Byroade's concern either.

Our concern over the possibility of the Soviet Union releasing Jews from behind the Iron Curtain, I said, was because we felt that with Israel's Messianic complex of Zionist salvation it would organize them all for Israel. It would then call for *Lebensraum* and the Middle East would explode, for I was convinced the Arab states—now stronger than in 1948—would not stand for another aggression.

His answer was—mark you—not a denial but that I was "needlessly disturbed because not many would come anyway."

When I pointed out that this speculation did not square with Zionist agitations in the United States describing how the Jews of the Communist countries are persecuted and calling for release of all of them, he answered, "We are not responsible for American Zionists."

So—each time they close the circle and it is very clear the "line" is memorized carefully and there is very little point in trying to have an intelligent and informed discussion.

The "binge" to a movie and dinner tonight turned out to be something of an enigma. The movie was routine. It was the dinner that provided the element of surprise. The chauffeur came to pick us up—without his wife. When I asked where she was, he said we would meet her at the place where we were going to eat. So we piled into the car and after about ten minutes we stopped in front of an apartment house.

"What's this?" I asked—probably not without a detectable note of suspicion in my voice, since I have not been really at ease any place here

and have—as a matter of practice—kept to public places except for my visit to Strauss' apartment.

"This is where we are going to eat," Mr. Chauffeur said. "This is my house and my wife insists that you be our guests for dinner."

Well, there was very little we could do. All of a sudden you know what real resignation is like and sort of relax and say, "We'll play this by ear and if this is it, this will be that."

It was a nice little apartment and Mr. Chauffeur has a very nice little wife and one child. We were served a very nice dinner—which suffered only from the typical Middle Eastern habit of serving too much accompanied by persistent assertions that you have not eaten enough.

I shall not detail the whole of the dinner conversation. I shall just say I cannot decide if it is a true, really pathetic story of despair and disillusionment which, I was assured, is shared by vast numbers here; or whether it is a very ingenious concoction designed in a further attempt to draw me out.

But there are two parts of the story which do not hang together well; or the logic of which I cannot put together. After telling me of his personal disappointment with the State, Mr. Chauffeur told me what I had already suspected; that when he was "assigned" to us he received specific instructions to report promptly wherever we went, whomever we saw and whatever we did. Further, that he was to instruct all hotel personnel to watch us and to check telephone calls, telegrams and similar, possible sources of information.

(Incidentally, all this leads me to a moment of self-congratulation for having decided last Thursday to keep all these letters together and mail them from Rome.)

Now it just doesn't add up that Mr. Arad's boys and the Israeli Intelligence should pick a guy who talks like he is more on our side than theirs in order to shadow us—*if* they think he really means what he says to us.

Anyhow—it is on this note that we build our bedtime story for the night.

This is already a long letter but at the expense of a paragraph or two more, let me wind up my impressions of Jerusalem, Israel, so that tomorrow I shall have to write you only of my talk with Eytan and about a couple of factories I am supposed to see and then send on to you anything of interest about Haifa where we shall be tomorrow night.

Here, for example, is a word on the "lighter side."

The most beautiful building in the city—paradoxically—is the Y.M.C.A. The "C" seems to be a constant source of irritation to this "Jewish" State. A half dozen people have complained that 90% of the membership is Jewish and still it is called the Y.M.C.A.

Nothing like the same "principle" prevents extensive displays, in the tourist shop of the King David Hotel, of "Holy Land" souvenirs, abundant with crosses, pictures of Jesus and New Testaments made with the local varieties of handcrafted decorations. I suspect that when Rabbi Herzog enters the hotel for diplomatic presentations he looks the other way so as to avoid seeing these objects displayed.

I think—if memory serves me correctly—that much of what I have written these past three days has been in a light vein. That is not entirely reflective of my sensations—or my mind.

In the first place, I am more than a little nervous. After all, a few weeks ago my picture was hung on news stands here, on the front cover of a tabloid magazine which called me some kind of an enemy to the State. I do not much trust the chauffeur. Mr. Mendelsohn is a trifle too coy for me. But I am also perfectly willing to recognize I cannot tell how much of this is subjective. That they do not trust me is very clear and—similarly—I cannot say I regard those with whom I have had contact (the Ichud group excepted) as any paragons of virtue.

But beyond these personal reactions, there are other attitudes which I think I can verify by objective experiences and conversations.

This is a grim country with such a self-consciousness that, in my opinion, it is doubtful if it can ever be normal. The driver, who is my greatest single source of information, believes all Jews must be saved. On top of their "Jewishness," therefore, is this Messianic complex.

I have noticed practically no sense of humor and I am always a little suspicious when that lack is so noticeable. Everyone is always making speeches—and the patter is always just about the same. The newest line—heard everywhere—is that everything here has been done in "seven years of independence"—which just ain't so, of course.

This country may well conquer the whole Middle East—if American Jews make it possible by political support and money. But Judaism here is founded on a nationalism where *Sh'vuoth* is a street festival and where religion means that not a piece of public transportation moves on a holiday or Sabbath.

Here you see—clearly—the difference between regarding oneself as being a Jew by *religion,* or by *nationality.* To be a Jew here is to share a nationalism that has ugly overtones of racism and exclusivism. It is a little absurd here to talk of "secularism" as if—for the most part—there is a different kind of identification as Jews. Here, at least, except for the "religious bloc" they are more consistent than American Zionism. Most make no pretense at religion. "Jewishness" is a common word and you must be here to see how, when it is used, it is intended to convey a completely "de-religionized" secularism.

Let me try to put it concretely in terms of this *Sh'vuoth* holiday. Here—in this secular State—the one who keeps the holiday does not think of synagogues and green leaves and flowers and prayers commemorating the spring season. Here the holiday crowd sees plays and attends picnics and seashore festivities. The two are as different as Passover and the Fourth of July.

The exception, of course, is in the religious quarter. But I have already indicated that those who live there are regarded as curios. Or, as we know, they are tolerated as a part of the governing coalition because Mr. Ben-Gurion and Mr. Sharett could find no less embarrassing political partners. So that even the "religious bloc" (which is not the same as the inhabitants of the religious quarter) are secularized through this marriage to Mapai.

I am not—I hope you realize—attempting to deny these people the right to live as they please. But if there is anything more clear than that when

they say "Jew" and *I* say "Jew" we are talking about two different, and even diametrically opposing, phenomena then I do not know where to look for it.

Americans *here* obviously give no more thought than they do at home to the Zionist design to confuse the two. They are more difficult to understand than the natives. One has the feeling of being constantly at a Hadassah Donor luncheon or a United Jewish Appeal meeting.

I see what I see with a heavy heart for there is tragedy written into the air and earth of this place if I know anything at all of social and political forces; and the tragedy may well involve the Jews of the world. For they have *allowed* this State—and its Zionist agents—to create and foster this confusion between their Judaism and the secular "Jewishness" of this political sovereignty.

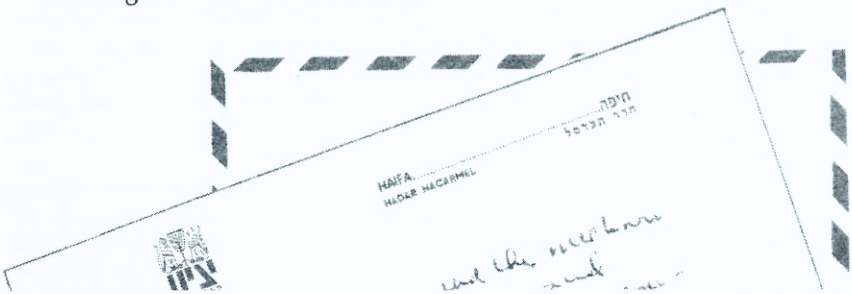
God! how true it is that "Jews must choose" and cannot forever excuse their involvement here on the grounds of innocence and a humanitarianism which is inhuman toward people who are not Jews.

How soberly right we are—and have been! How incompatible is the oil of a universal faith with the water of a nationalistic Israel!

Of these things I am sure and I am grateful—despite all the uneasiness of these days—to those who insisted I must come here if I made this trip. And how understandable it is for the Arabs with whom I talked to agree that I must come here to see for myself! They are a long way from perfect—and I had no hesitancy about telling them so—but they know the facts speak eloquently for themselves and the Israelis are always afraid you will hear what the facts say without their very dexterous interpretations.

Well, this is enough at the end of a very hard day. We shall both be happy when Tuesday morning dawns and we are looking forward to Rome and Europe. You who have been "carrying the ball" while I am away will not have much sympathy with my observation that this has hardly been a vacation, but I will say it anyhow.

Best regards to all from both of us. Elmer



May 29, 1955

HÁIFA

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

This is being written from the Zion (none other) Hotel in Haifa. We reached here after a very upsetting day. Something mysterious is happening about our plane reservations for Tuesday. The "travel agent" had assured me the seats were definite. I spent two hours in Tel Aviv this afternoon where I discovered no one knew anything about them. I finally saw the manager of Air France who has practically committed himself to getting us on a flight on Tuesday morning.

We shall hurry our trip tomorrow to Nazareth and Tiberias in order to return to Tel Aviv before the offices close. I do not know if there is more to this than just inefficiency in the airlines, for I would never have come had Mr. Mendelsohn not told the American Vice-Consul in Jerusalem everything was in order.

It will be difficult, in view of our concern about leaving on time, but I shall try to settle down to write a coherent letter.

First of all, my conversation with Eytan went about as expected. It was cool, formal and uninspiring. I told him my firm impression that there are large areas of the Arab world where a basis for peace with a reasonable Israel might be found. His answer surprised me—even in terms of the arrogance I have experienced and noticed often here.

"When the Arabs catch up to 1955, come back and let me know," he said.

He was, of course, referring to the fact that *official* Arab pronouncements are mentioning the 1947 partition plans as a *basis* for negotiating peace. I had not mentioned these and I regarded his statement as insulting and highly cynical.

I stayed only about fifteen minutes. It was obvious, from the number of telephone calls made and received, that he was impatient for me to go—and I can take a hint!

Then I went to see two factories in Jerusalem. One is a shoe factory employing about 250 people and producing about 2,000 pairs of shoes a week. They looked like pretty good shoes.

When I asked—as I always do—where did the capital come from, the answer was the usual answer, "From America and the Histadruth." When I asked if the enterprise was profitable I was told, "Well, if you don't count return on capital we are doing very well." Who couldn't!

The other factory was a pharmaceutical plant. This is really a small place but it looked like a good, working proposition. It is quite old but clean and highly mechanized. The principal products are antibiotics which are exported to Turkey and Europe. The employees are mostly women.

This is a profitable enterprise and I suspect is the kind of thing this State eventually could do well and on a justifiable, economic basis. For here very special skills are applied to simple raw materials which are then sold on a very profitable market. But all this is a long way from being the industrial giant of the Middle East.

On the way up here from Tel Aviv we passed a number of the industrial "centers" of Israel. There is the Kaiser-Frazer assembly plant and what (I think we were told) is the largest cement plant in Israel. I do not mean to make odious comparisons but it is simply demonstrable, brick by brick and square foot by square foot, that none of these places even approaches the size or stature of the cotton textile plant I saw in Egypt; or the booming industrial life I saw in Iraq. And again you think to yourself, if only these people here would relax their advertising without relaxing their energies things would be more nearly in focus. When you hear the build-up of the Kaiser plant via Zionist propaganda at home you forget there are nearly more members of the C.I.O. United Automobile Workers than people in the whole State of Israel and so when you see this "monster"

assembly plant you sort of smile and say it is lucky they are assembling Kaiser cars because you could not put more than one Cadillac in it at a time.

This drive today was through a generally beautiful part of the country, however. This is the Old Palestine where the first settlements were established long before Herzl dreamed of a "Jewish" nation or Ben-Gurion made a blustering foreign policy speech. Is it somehow symbolic that these early settlements were financed by Jews who made it clear they were not Zionists!

From part of the road you see the Mediterranean and the countryside is green, well cultivated and fertile. Through here also are very heavy concentrations of the army—often in encampments left by the British after 1948.

Just before we came to Haifa we saw a *maabarah,* or transition camp. It is very large and the driver said about 5,000 people live there. It is pretty grim with its corrugated iron huts and box-wood shanties. Naturally, you wonder why with less immigration than emigration—or at least nearly a balance for several years—any such large number of people should still be living in these conditions. And you wonder too why, with an average of about $50,000,000 a year from American Jews and with pretty fancy office buildings going up for the Foreign Ministry and with fairly elaborate memorials to Herzl, these people are left to live as they do.

So—since it is clear there is little for us to gain by extraordinary prudence—I asked around about these "wonderings." I asked the driver and a couple of people in the hotel here, earlier in the evening.

Everyone is generally vague, for apparently I do not have the expected reaction to this transition camp. I am supposed not to be surprised, but hurt that American Jews have not put up enough money. Maybe this is a "showcase" for reluctant contributors to the United Jewish Appeal.

Anyhow, one answer I received is that the inhabitants are mostly Iraqis and they are accustomed to living in these conditions because "there are no apartments in Iraq"!

Another answer was that these people have been cut off from all relief and possibilities of better housing because they have refused to go to the Negev.

I do not profess to know the answers. I am not unaccustomed to slums —and this was certainly a kind of enlarged shanty-town. And perhaps no answer received to a direct question is as eloquent as the fact these people are just there—while "charity" funds are used to erect public buildings, national shrines, finance propaganda, open immigration recruiting centers in North Africa and so on, *ad infinitum,* down the list of purposes set out in those Jewish Agency statements which no one but us seems ever to read or analyze. Anyway, I leave it at that for you to draw your own conclusions.

Haifa, by the way, is a beautiful city. We approached it by coming up over Mt. Carmel. At one spot you can stand and look out over the city, down into the harbor and on up the coast to the Lebanese mountains. Here there is something of the variety of color and architecture we found in Beirut, or Damascus. There is less of the dead, even uniformity that we noticed in Tel Aviv, even during the few hours we were there and in the midst of all the irritations about our plane reservations.

Haifa, by the way, is a law unto itself. It is the only city in Israel that has public transportation on Saturday. This is because the Mapai has complete control locally and so does what it wants.

Generally, I think I should say, the little people you meet as waiters, newsboys, clerks, shopkeepers and the like seem pleasant. But they are very provincial. This is understandable for they have mostly come here from shut-off places in Europe and they remain here, largely shut off from the world.

They are also over-institutionalized. I think I have never seen so many nameplates of donors and "In Memoriam" any place in the world. It seems as though every institution of Jews in the United States, plus every individual Jew, plus some who are not Jews, must have given the country either a hospital, an orphan asylum, a couple of trees or a monument. I should think the psychology of all this would be depressing. Everywhere you look is a sign indicating that where you sit, the tree that gives you shade, the roof that covers your head has been donated by someone else. It reminds me of the days when I was a Rabbi in Flint and it was decided to raise money for the congregation by buying a memorial tablet for the Temple foyer. Name-plates would then be sold on the large tablet and on the anniversaries of deaths a little electric bulb would be screwed into the socket opposite the name. I fought the thing then as an undignified kind of sentimentality. But it is obvious sentimentality is one of Israel's biggest exports and that it is worth more than its weight in gold. There cannot possibly be as many sick, old-aged, orphaned and others institutionalized here as might be indicated by the number of "donated" institutions—each with its little (or big) bronze plaque. Or if there are that many occupants this country is a sure-fire bet for the defense of the Middle East!

I earnestly and devoutly hope this will be the last installment of this letter I shall write in Israel, for despite a not-too-promising prospect tonight, I hope to be on the plane Tuesday morning.

And now we are both really "beat"—and more concerned than either of us will admit to the other. But I hope all goes well.

Sincerely,
Elmer

May 31, 1955
IN FLIGHT

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

We are out—thank the Lord—on a non-stop flight to Rome. This was not without some doing and plenty of *baksheesh* in this "Western" state.

The "doing" included a direct threat to bring in the American Ambassador. It is a tourist flight—but we are happy to be on it.

I shall not trouble you with the details. I am sure that when we look back—now that it is over—this will be one of the amusing episodes of the trip. But it wasn't funny while it lasted.

Suffice it to say we came back to Tel Aviv yesterday afternoon and Mr. Mendelsohn's agent then tricked me into paying him the fairly substantial sum I owed him by leading me to believe our reservations were confirmed. He caught me on a technicality involving code markings on our tickets. Although he said the tickets showed our seats were definite they were not. And we had to fight our way on to the plane through a good deal of last night and this morning.

Even after we were seated our experiences were not over. The plane kept standing and standing while there was a great argument going on about half-way down toward the front. We are sitting in the last two seats—where else! I finally learned from the stewardess that the center of this rather unrestrained argument is a "religious" man who refuses to sit in the middle seat of the three on the left side of the plane (just like our coach flights at home) because he will not sit next to a woman who is not his wife. This necessitated some fairly involved chess-moves which Lessing, at any rate after a couple of my efforts to play with him, will know were way over my head. My suggestion, advanced in a stage-whisper, was for him to take the next plane.

And all this is supposed to solve the problem of anti-Semitism. If these are "my people" or this is *my* religion; or, if there is some exciting romance about all this then my poor English professor of so many years ago just wasted his time. Because the reality just doesn't correspond to my understanding of any of the language used in the descriptive phrases.

Other than the difficulties about the plane reservations, yesterday was a fairly peaceful day. Before we left the hotel in Haifa, the message clerk called to say—guess what—"Mr. Arad from our Foreign Ministry called last night while you were out to say he was unable to arrange any appointments for you with any of the Arabs in Nazareth. All the best!"

The drive from Haifa to Tiberias is pleasant. We did not stop in Nazareth because we were pushed for time in order to be back in Tel Aviv by 3:00 p.m. and, anyway, Mr. Arad—well—let's not go into that again! But all through that section the Arab nature of the country is evident. Oddly enough—and a little amusing in view of Zionist propaganda themes that all Arabs ride around on camels—we saw the longest camel caravan anywhere in the Middle East on the road leading out of Nazareth. After all, I have nothing against camels—even in Israel—and both Ruth and I thought it was a very picturesque sight.

Tiberias is a very beautiful place. The antiquities are badly preserved and you are very close again to the fantastic border situation for the Syrian line comes more than half-way down the eastern shore of the lake and a mythical line divides Syria and Israel.

Ruth went swimming while I sat on the porch of a lovely little hotel and drank a long, cold glass of pretty good beer. It's hot there—since it is below sea-level. Then, after lunch we hurried back to Tel Aviv and the already related "battle of the airline and Mendelsohn offices."

I had my second interesting visit last night in Israel. We were called by a man by the name of Stein—in Tel Aviv. He asked if he might see me. I asked him why and he said he is an anti-Zionist. I told him that I thought it would be unwise for *him* to see me; that we were being watched and the hotel would know of any callers and I had no intention of going out. He said he is under constant surveillance anyhow and so nothing could be lost.

He brought with him a young man named Zichroni, who is a close friend and member of the same organization as the young artist who recently staged the hunger-strike in order to demonstrate his opposition to the marriage law.

These people represent a handful in this country. Their anti-Zionism—at the moment—consists largely of opposition to the Government's Arab policy both in, and outside, Israel. They are friendly with the Magnes group but believe it to be too conservative. They are probably right, in any practical look at the situation.

We had a long talk. I shall not detail it here, but even allowing for their political orientation, they confirmed everything we all know about treatment of the Arab minority and the Israeli policies on refugee property. It is obvious Israel is spending the money received by the Custodian of Alien Properties and, if a settlement ever comes involving compensation, the State will expect American Jews or the United States Government to pay the bill. We had confirmation of this in Jerusalem where a fancy antique shop is well stocked with Arab works of art and handicraft. The place is well known—as is the man who runs it. It is apparently an open secret in Israel that he paid the Custodian of Alien Properties a trifling sum for enough very good looking stock to keep him in business for a very long time.

Zichroni told me the school system teaches the children Arabs are inferior people. Then, from school—both boys and girls—must serve in the army where the whole purpose for a large (for Israel) military establishment is explained in terms of Arab threats. By this time the youth are 20 years old—and the pattern is set.

Zichroni said Israeli youth politically were divided into two classes. (1) The red hot chauvinists, produced by this educational system and (2) those who are completely indifferent. This, I have learned from experience, is the usual pattern of an ideological state.

Zichroni and his group, helped by Stein's group, which is older, hope to be able to do something with the "indifferentists."

I learned from Stein, who is a lawyer, an answer to one question that has always intrigued me. Ostensibly there is "free emigration" from Israel. I have never been able to understand therefore why so many of the emigrants you meet are "illegal."

Stein's explanation is that in order legally to emigrate you must repay the State everything the State has invested in order to bring you to, and establish you in, Israel; and your taxes must be paid to date. I said this hardly seemed fair because the "investments" came from capital supplied by people who just wanted to help Jews and that if Jews were unhappy in Israel and could obtain visas to go elsewhere I doubted if the donors of funds would expect these unhappy Israeli Jews to reimburse the State. Stein

said the State took a different position. The Government held that these funds are *national* funds—not charity—and the investments made in these people who are "ingathered" are investments of national capital which must not be dissipated.

Interesting—isn't it? It is charity going in—but you can't buy a round-trip ticket because it becomes national business going out, and so, if you can manage it, you sell the same commodity twice. I wonder if the "humanitarians" at home would be interested.

I spoke to Zichroni about coming to the United States where a little of his straight talk and objective attitude might help. Perhaps it would make an impression if a native Israeli, who is convinced present policies in Israel and among American Zionists are destroying *his* future, expressed himself directly to Americans. He said he doubted if he would be granted an exit visa, but suggested I write him if anyone else thought well of the idea.

Oddly enough, after four days of blackout, two newspaper men sought me out at the airport this morning. This is only another example of how well meshed is the internal Intelligence of the State. *They*—obviously—knew when we were leaving even before we knew ourselves. I hope no one will be embarrassed by what I said, but I certainly did not mince any words.

I hope you will all sense something of my serious effort to be as objective as it is humanly possible for me to be about these past five days. It is true that I do not look at Israel either with the uninformed indifference of its "philanthropic" supporters or the starry-eyed chauvinism of its "nationalistic" lobbyists among American Zionists and pro-Zionist non-Zionists. I have tried to see it as we of the Council have said American Jews should see it; as another foreign state which is part of a distant and different area of the world and a State to which we neither owe obligations nor from which we accept rights.

I tried—with the same procedures I followed in the Arab countries—to see authoritative people to obtain authoritative answers. That I was unsuccessful is entirely the fault of the Israelis. I spent just about the amount of time in Israel that I spent in each of the Arab countries, except Egypt. My mind and conscience are clear that I could not have done more—and the chips will have to fall where they will. I am not complaining. I went with my eyes open.

I should even say I am glad a number of people *insisted* that I go to Israel as a part of this trip. I only wish some of those who do not see the practical value of the Council's work would now take my advice as seriously and never come to this area without visiting the Arab countries as well as Israel. There will just be no attitude among American Jews conducive to peace out here until more people do this.

If I ever believed a Council was necessary, I am more than ever convinced now. One can be completely detached and objective about the State of Israel without losing sight of the fact that it is a danger of immense proportions and of almost limitless dynamics leading to catastrophe to mingle our faith with the destiny of this secular, political, chauvinism which also calls itself "Jewish." And I am firmly convinced ours is a vain hope where

we say, in our San Francisco statement, that "Israel may shed its Zionism"—or words to that effect. Zionism—in *all* its forms (economic, political, cultural, immigration-wise)—is Israel's biggest business.

One other thought occurs to me. Admittedly—despite efforts at home to say there are no longer any arguments possible about Zionism—this whole complex of problems out here is a living, dangerous controversy. And perhaps the nature of the controversy can be pinpointed if it can be found that a number of responsible men, approaching the problem independently and from different angles, agree *on the fundamentals.*

I hope my letters from the Arab countries and the earlier ones from Israel have revealed to you the single, strongest impression I have, now that it is over and I am sitting in this plane with the next stop Rome. Important and responsible Arabs, the Ichud group (whom I regard as the most reasonable and liberal of the Israelis I met), Mr. Dulles and Mr. Byroade have all agreed—independently and in different language—*that the core of this problem is in the attitudes of American Jews.* What is out here to be resolved are *all details.* Only a clear-cut decision made by American Jews *on the basis of knowledge* can break asunder the unholy tie between 8,000 square miles in this Middle East and the Zionist myth that those 8,000 square miles are the magnet drawing all of the wealth, the aspirations, the uncritical political support and even—eventually—the persons of 11,000,000 Jews throughout the world. I am convinced the Arabs are prepared to deal reasonably with the 8,000 square miles and those who now inhabit them. I am also convinced they are determined they have made their last deal with the other amorphous entity.

And the tragedy—for both Israel and the non-Israeli Jews—is that the non-Israeli Jews are allowing the Israeli-Zionist apparatus to call the tune and to keep alive the myth that these 8,000 square miles are the apple-of-the-eye of the "Jews of the world."

While the Zionists play this game and non-Zionists acquiesce, time is running out—for the Israelis. For sooner or later—and I believe rather sooner than later—the enormous human and material potential of the Arab world will overtake a society in which the physical accomplishments even now do not surpass those of the neighboring Arab countries; and where one is reminded constantly that these physical accomplishments have always been in the past—and even now are—created without regard to "return on capital" to use the phrase used to me by Israelis themselves. The race is unequal and even if *no* moralities were involved, wise statesmanship in Israel would recognize the closing of the gap. For if that gap is closed while the present bitterness is built into the emergent, new character of the rest of the Middle East then Israel's only hope will be the active intercession of American arms. I am in no position to say whether or not such intercession would be forthcoming. But I can guess that it is improbable.

And the *real* tragedy would not be an artificial and arrogant political sovereignty about which the vast majority of American Jews do not give a hoot. The real tragedy will be the more than a million victims of earlier tragedy which the vast majority of American Jews have been told they were helping while the Zionist movement kept the truth of the situation from everyone except a few stubborn-minded people who insisted upon examining the facts—*and the ideologies* involved—themselves.

And now this has been an exhausting morning. The plane is crowded. You have both been wonderfully patient to read all I have written and to take the trouble to write me, encouraging me to write more. But there must be a limit to your good natures.

Since you will probably not have the same interest in Ruth's shopping excursions in Rome and Paris or in the daily consumption of spaghetti I shall probably not write again unless something irresistibly brilliant occurs to me.

For now, we are both just thankful to be out. Tonight we shall raise a cup of good old Chianti to all our friends and the great blessing of being "dispersed."

Thanks to both of you again for your welcome letters and Ruth joins in sending our fondest greetings to Edith and Lil as well as to both of you.

As ever,

Elmer

June 5, 1955

On Board S.S. Independence

Dear Lessing and Buddie:

In order to have a couple of days of badly needed rest, we changed our plans. Instead of flying to North Africa, we picked up this ship yesterday in Naples and shall go to Gibraltar; thence to Tangier.

My resolution not to bother you with further letters did not last very long. In the peace and quiet of my deck chair I have been reexamining my reactions to the Israeli situation. The process has been greatly facilitated by talking to a couple of experts in Rome who may be more detached than I.

One is an American Foreign Service man whom I had met at our Damascus Embassy while we were in Syria. He is now en route home for leave and re-assignment. The other is a top American foreign correspondent for one of the best newspapers in the United States.

I asked the Foreign Service man why—on the basis of his experience—

he thought the Israelis had so obviously been uncooperative in helping me see authoritative people. He thought a long time and then said, in his opinion, they were more clever than any pre-visit speculations had given them credit for being.

There were, he said, three possibilities in his opinion.

1. They could have either refused us entrance or so involved the visa request in red-tape and Governmental machinery that we would have given up. Either choice, he felt, would have reacted badly on them.
2. Having permitted us to enter they might have rolled out a "red carpet" and made strenuous efforts to "make me see the light." This involved two complications.
   (a) They were pretty sure they could not change my mind about *fundamentals*. We have often said we have no quarrel with the State if it becomes a normal State. We have never questioned its material achievements. But we have, without reservation, opposed the basic ideology of the State and this basic ideology is a reality in Middle East politics. Therefore, no "red carpet" would influence my attitude on the fundamentals.
   (b) The "red carpet" would also have embarrassed them another way. The treatment could not have been given without some attention in the press, radio and other communication media. It would therefore have put a kind of stamp of approval on me, the Council and our philosophy. Since the philosophy of the State is exactly the opposite it would have been in the position of telling its citizens it welcomed an advocate of an ideology with which the State wants its people to have no sympathy.
3. Therefore, the third possibility was to avoid both embarrassments by allowing us in and treating us as the people who weren't there. Now, when I return, if I make statements critical of the State or its basic ideology, they can say, "He doesn't know what he is talking about. He saw no one of any importance or authority and has no responsible answers to any of his questions."

Well, it is an interesting analysis by a "pro." It seems logical and we shall certainly have an opportunity to test his prophecy in the months ahead.

In addition I want to make it very clear that I saw the "deserts in bloom," the modern cities, the irrigation and drainage projects—and all the rest which is so abundantly projected into American propaganda mills. Of course, I have never denied that they exist.

But I have two reservations about them:

(1) They are all matched—or surpassed—by similar projects in the other countries of the area. This fact *does not* minimize what exists in Israel. But it *does put the lie* to the Israeli-Zionist line that Israel is the only hope for progress in the Middle East.

(2) The significance of the Israeli accomplishments themselves—without regard to comparison with the rest of the area—is mightily diluted

by the fact that Israel is more of an institution supported by charity than it is a State. Extraordinarily large grants from the United States or United Jewish Appeal or German reparations or Bonds—or even capital invested more on a basis of sentiment than hard accounting analyses—have supplied the capital. But even this vast amount of capital—loosely invested—has not been enough. The trade balance is still astronomically out of line. The consumer goods available to Israelis are shoddy. Everyone—in the most general and unprecise terms—says "Israel will be self-supporting in five years; or ten years." It is like pulling a figure out of a hat. I am convinced no one knows when—or if—the State will stand on its own. Certainly it seems it can never do so without peace with the Arabs—and there is very little evidence of an *official* desire for peace. The talk of peace is like the talk of self-sufficiency—all in general terms and in the language of orations rather than specifics.

None of this vast amount of "charity" capital is regarded as seriously invested capital for which respectable returns are expected or required. No one asks what anything costs. All is regarded as Israel's "due" because it has taken in refugees and because it is being built to save the Jews of the world in any catastrophe.

I cannot exult over wheat fields in the desert when I see with my own eyes how intricate an irrigation system is required and realize that even before it was begun there was no regard for cost. And there is no expectation that cost will ever adequately be returned with profit.

Therefore, if the Jews of the world are, by principle, committed to building a national state with exclusivist, racial policies and designed to take in any and all Jews at any time, Israel is some kind of an accomplishment. *But the accomplishment is certainly not Israel's.* It is—in a literal sense—the accomplishment of "the Jewish people" who are dividing their national interests and their substance between Israel and the countries in which they live.

But when you say this to *American* Jews—or when American Zionists are confronted with the argument that they are masquerading such a separate "Jewish" national design behind humanitarianism—you draw the well-worn denial which describes all this as nothing more than sentiment and "humanitarianism." Yet, it must be clear—and it is—to anyone who travels out there that the "sentiment" and "humanitarianism" play less than a major role in the dynamics of a State. The *State* takes the financial results of "sentimental" and "humanitarian" appeals and uses them for closely calculated *national* advantages. Even this would not be so wrong if the *nationalism itself,* which is involved, were not centered on faith, or race, or ethnic values—or whatever description you prefer among the many used or implied in Zionism's "Jewish" peoplehood.

Suppose—for the sake of argument—that Israel, *on an average,* had better housing, more paved streets, more sewerage, better irrigation than any Arab county. This could well be so, although I should like to stress again that we saw nothing in Israel, in the way of individual projects, which we did not see in other countries. The *average per person* in Israel may be higher, in terms of such physical advantages. But there is no indication that the other countries are therefore inferior in skills, energy or—

at least of recent years—even in terms of consciousness of the economic and social improvements required by present day living.

But even this comparison is again reduced to the fundamental question of whether this higher average is the result of *Israeli* natural resources, energy and ingenuity; or whether it is the culmination of assets made available *to* the Israelis by a "world-wide Jewish nation."

Quite apart from the intellectual integrity involved in raising this fundamental question *before* making any house by house or street by street comparison between Israel and the neighboring states, there is the absolutely inescapable fact that this "ideological" question is the very heart of the further problem of war or peace in the area.

The Arab countries will not negotiate with a political entity in Israel which regards itself—and which is regarded by non-Israeli Jews—as the spearhead in the Middle East for "Jewish" national aspirations. I return firmly convinced however, that there *is* a hope for peaceful negotiations of outstanding issues if the Arab countries are convinced the other party is just another, normal state in the area—prepared to share the vicissitudes and to contribute to the progress *of the whole area* on a basis of respect and equality.

Therefore, I do *not* shut my eyes to the material progress *in Israel.* Many, many Arabs recognize it and freely admit it. The important point is that this progress is *not at issue.* What is at issue is the context in which this progress has been made. What is at issue is the *fundamental* attitude of the American Jews who provide the financial *and* the political sinews which the Israelis interpret as a mark of *their superiority* in the area. And from this interpretation of "superiority" there follow all the arrogance, the truculence and the general atmosphere of the conqueror which provides the *basic* cause of suspicion and bitterness out in the Middle East.

I do not expect the American *Zionist* to change. He lives and feeds on encouraging American Jews to ever closer identity and affinity with this Israeli State. He has pretty well succeeded in indoctrinating too many American "non-Zionists" with a sense of moral obligation for *financial* support; and he has so dulled the sensitivities of many American Jews that they can no longer see this Zionist plan to increase identity with Israel through "Hebrew culture" and "political propaganda"—including the insinuation into their minds of fantastic distortions of Arabs. And the American Jew—the "non-Zionist"—fears and rejects *only* the unguarded appeals of a Ben-Gurion for active immigration. All the rest—the uncritical financing of the State through "charitable" funds, the apathy to what their children are taught under the guise of Judaism, the periodic hysterias directed against Mr. Dulles or Mr. Byroade—all these either roll off the back of the average Jew like water off a duck; or he says we are too extreme in pointing them out; or that these are "expected" excesses for a "new nation." He is "not a Zionist—but"!

Well, he is wrong. He is as wrong as an honest, well-meaning, self-respecting man can be—this average American "non-Zionist" Jew. For these things, which he so lightly dismisses, are the guts of the problem.

If only we could convince him; or better, if only he would convince

himself by doing what we have done these past seven weeks! No one—but no one—wants to stop him from building one, super-deluxe apartment house for any *legitimate* citizen of Israel. But when this average "non-Zionist" says he is not interested in the fact that *Israeli* definitions of a *legitimate* resident of Israel include *any* Jew, from *anywhere,* at *any time*—then the apartment house he helps build becomes an impediment to peace. When the average "non-Zionist" contributes to the United Jewish Appeal and says it is none of his business if this new apartment house goes up on the land—and perhaps right before the eyes—of a dispossessed Arab refugee, then the apartment house becomes an instrument for hate rather than an improvement of the chances for peace. When the average "non-Zionist" follows the stupid line that Arabs are "anti-Semites," then his "humanitarianism" re-inforces the tribal exclusiveness of the Israeli State and—out there where we have just been—he hurts with his humanitarianism rather than employing that wonderful quality to help.

So I have not effervesced over the plumbing or the flowers in the desert or indulged in the usual clichés about Israel. I leave that to the Zionists and the professional fund-raisers. I see these things—even now sitting here on this ship—in perspective and against the background of the whole question of how *Israel* obtained the *money* and the *political support* for its very existence.

And I come back always to the same conclusion. Against this background of the well-meaning but badly informed American Jews who have provided this financial and political support—viewed as a *humanitarian* project—Israel is an anomaly, for there is no reason—in a human sense—why people must still live in transition camps while the Government builds a sumptuous new capital in New Jerusalem and the Histadruth constructs a $5,000,000 structure for its shadow government, to cite only two examples.

I cannot see how it is possible to have it both ways.

One of the people in Rome with whom I checked my impressions entered a slight qualification which I pass on with the feeling it may have merit.

He thinks Israel would like to have a peace *now*—but not a very firm peace. That is, he believes the border raids and constant military tension maintained under the "retaliation" policy are designed to scare the Arab states individually in the hope that one or more of them might make some kind of a settlement. Then—through Zionism—as it has repeatedly done in the past—Israel would be able to say it had won the peace with its own power and was under no international obligation, involving any of the great powers, to respect the peace at a time when it might be advantageous for Israel to forget such a peace. This person is convinced that, above all, Israel wants to avoid a Middle East peace which is *internationally* guaranteed and he holds that it is for this reason Israel is even now offering the greatest resistance to the U. N. Truce Organization. There is a great deal of this feeling in the Middle East among UNRWA and some U. N. people we saw.

The Foreign Service man also pointed out that the Israeli Government is as much at the mercy of extremists as are some of the Arab Governments.

The logic of Zionism is found best and most clearly expressed in the

Herut (Revisionist) party as indeed the past demonstrates. Jabotinsky was closer to the reality than Weizmann. Ben-Gurion is the "respectable" front for this position. Israel's time is running out. In ten years—at the most—Iraq and Egypt will be powerful states by Middle East standards and even U. S. aid and Zionist support will be discounted by the rapidly altering situation in the Middle East itself. Therefore, in a way, it is now or never and this Foreign Service man believes that, as with many ideological states, Israeli leadership may well risk smashing the whole business in a desperate effort to beat this race against time.

We all agreed that the real, tragic victims of all this are the Arab refugees *and* the man on the street in Israel. This too is not unusual. If present trends continue, we may see these unhappy people again the objects of suffering and homelessness.

Another victim, we are all agreed, will be the American Jew. One can plead innocence for so long; and one can ask indulgence for excesses for so long because of extenuating circumstances. But the shape of Israel is now a palpable, responsible sovereignty which makes no bones about its "partnership" with all Jews. If the "partnership" is caught engaging in unethical practices however, it will be mighty difficult for one of the partners to be free of guilt on the grounds that he did not know how the business was being run.

I write all this because I think you all should know that upon a second and even a third look at our five days in Israel—plus the double-checking of two, experienced observers—I find little reason to alter any basic opinions. I am glad to realize that I was not thrown off completely by a very unpleasant, personal experience. On the other hand, I earnestly regret that my fairly grim observations seem to stand up in a more relaxed atmosphere and check out with these two men.

It does not seem like two months since we have been gone but now that we are making toward home, we are both agreed we are about ready for it.

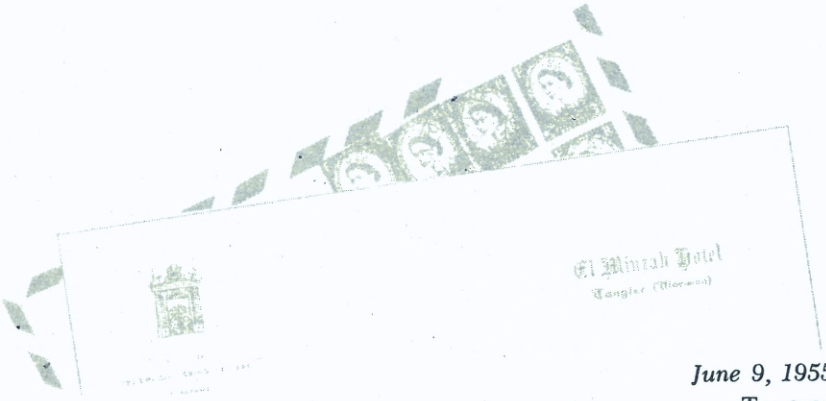
I wish only that more of you, who have given so much to the Council, could some day experience what we did during the past seven weeks. You should all know—by seeing at first hand—that what you have built is not a theory, however logical and reasoned it is. It is a tough, realistic part of one of the most vexatious problems of the world today and we are making a practical contribution. But the degree of that practicality can be measured only when you see it in the context of the area where the forces with which we deal all converge.

I am grateful to all of you for the confidence you placed in me in agreeing to my going on this trip. I am sure, as a result, the Council has benefited. One of the things I want very much to discuss is the possibility that others from the Council will go, now that the ice has been broken.

Ruth joins me in sending our best to all and we are looking forward to seeing all of you rather soon.

As ever,

Elmer



June 9, 1955
TANGIER

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

I fully expected that the letter I wrote from the ship would be my last to you on this trip. We came here primarily to visit with an old friend. But once here, we found ourselves thrust into the middle of the local political situation—and with special emphasis upon the problems of Jews, of whom there are some 300,000 in Tangier and French Morocco together and perhaps another 40,000 in Spanish Morocco. There are perhaps another 150,000 in Tunisia and Algeria.

We examined the situation under good auspices and authority—the vice-President of the Tangier community. I had met this man when we were here two years ago.

First, let me cite some simple statistics and facts:

1. About 10,000-12,000 Jews probably are going to Israel this year. Their transportation is paid and they are encouraged to register for emigration at a local "Aliyah" office. Some Jews are also returning from Israel because of discrimination there against Oriental Jews.
2. *Everyone* here is wary because of the general political climate. No one doubts that eventually the nationalists will win. The only question is over how much French resistance and therefore at what cost in bloodshed and terror.
3. There is *no* special pressure upon Jews. The forces combining to make for the emigration to Israel are:

   (a) Poverty. This is the most basic cause. The very poorest Jews are leaving. The leadership of the community here is not opposing their departure because it relieves them of obligations. But abject poverty is not a peculiarly "Jewish" condition here. Its elimination is an objective of the revolution that is under way.

   (b) General unrest which is creating a serious, economic problem for the country and which aggravates the basic poverty fostered by colonialism. This means that even some Jews who would normally not be so badly off are feeling the pinch of an economy that reflects the wide-spread instability of the country.

   (c) The facility with which these poor and somewhat perplexed people can get to Israel; free transportation and the usual glowing promises of what awaits them there.

No one knows if the "neutrality" adopted by the local Jewish leadership toward Zionist recruiting of immigration is wise, or not. I, of course, argued

it was unwise—and met little resistance but, on the other hand, no enthusiastic takers.

But there is one simple fact our zealous fund-raisers never mention. Even if the present rate of immigration from here continues, what with the natural increase and those returning, the population of Jews in Morocco for the foreseeable future will remain somewhere between 250,000 and 300,000.

Furthermore, since the basic pressure is poverty, standing here and not on a United Jewish Appeal-Zionist-Israeli drum-beating platform, the simple question occurs of why the $90,000,000 United Jewish Appeal target (or some major part of it being raised by exploiting the conditions of these people) is not spent *here* to alleviate their poverty; to give them proper education and mend their fences with the majority population. The answer, of course, is that in such a simple direct, human effort, there would be no net profit for the "Jewish" State which next year will be able to say it took in so many North African Jews and the United Jewish Appeal must now finance their integration *in Israel.*

You simply cannot see this problem from this end of the world—and having still fresh in my memory the story of the Iraqi Jews—without realizing how utterly unrelated to "humanitarian" facts is the whole business of Israeli-United Jewish Appeal fund-raising. Since any campaign in America would fall flat on its face if it advertised, "Come and give money to build the 'Jewish' State and to strengthen its army and to construct a new office building for the Foreign Ministry and to pay for propaganda running down the Arabs and glorifying Israel"—since none of these would work—the campaign is based on a spurious and unrealistic emotionalism of saving the Jews of North Africa.

This, in my opinion, is one of the most cynical programs in the world today. Its victims are the well-meaning but misguided Jews in America (who should know better) and the poor, bewildered exploited humans from the ghettoes of this part of the world. I regret—in a way—a show of temper and indignation but I have seen and heard much these last eight or nine weeks and I am full to the brim with the results of cynicism, timidity, and worship of sacred cows when a little humility and a sense of God would do wonders.

In any event, I asked what might be done in a constructive way over and above our continuing effort to reveal the facts. Two suggestions were made and I pass them on now simply as a matter of record and a possible basis for discussion when I return.

The basic philosophy of those who wish to stay in Morocco and who know emigration *cannot* solve *any* problems, whether it is wise or not, is that the security of Jews here is related to the general enlightenment of the Arab. This becomes not an ideal but a practical consideration before the gradual but inevitable withdrawal of French influence. *It is also essential for the Jews here to make it crystal clear that they regard themselves as complete—and equal—compatriots of the Arabs.*

Deriving from this basic philosophy, to which I subscribe without reservation, these were the two suggestions:

1. There is an American school here attended by children of all nationalities and religions. It is five years old. It is probably the seedling

from which there may develop eventually a modern educational system for this country. Last year the school obtained some small increase in funds and advertised in the local press that it would be able to accommodate about 75 children instead of the 35 of the year before. 2,000 people stood at the door on the appointed morning. Naturally, most of them were turned away. Since there are native Jews among even the present small school population, the leaders of the local Jewish community feel that it would be a good melting pot, in an institution which may play a significant part in the future of the country, if this school were helped—and particularly by Jews.

The school is well administered and is a thrilling example of real integration.

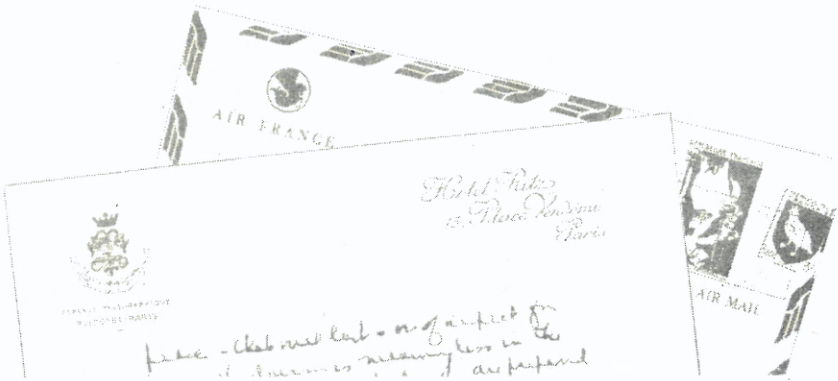
2. The second suggestion involves a trade-technical school which would be open to under-privileged Jewish and Moslem boys on an equal basis. This project would have to be started from scratch. It is estimated that it would take about $50,000 to build and equip such a school and from $12,000 to $15,000 a year to run it. I am reasonably sure the land for such a project would be given us if we are interested in going through with it.

Naturally, I have made no commitments to anyone. But I am prepared to offer good reasons why our Philanthropic Fund should support both of these projects—if possible—or, at least, certainly the second. If these people are to be helped, something but United Jewish Appeal-Jewish Agency, Youth Aliyah and other similar, Zionist-minded groups must put a foot in the door and make these people see that we have not all abandoned them to the Zionists.

I think this about covers the information I have gained here and so this will probably be my last communique before returning home.

Ruth joins in sending best to all.

Elmer



June 24, 1955
PARIS

DEAR LESSING AND BUDDIE:

A very unpleasant situation has come to my attention today and compels me to add a kind of footnote to my series of letters because I want you to be informed in the event there are reverberations before I return.

I think I wrote you that the Israeli press paid no attention to us until we were literally at Lyddá airport, ready to board our plane. This was O.K. with me.

But today I received a letter from a friend of mine in Jordan saying that *the day after* we left Israel, the Israel Radio broadcast to Jordan, in Arabic, a report of an alleged interview. The résumé of that alleged interview as reported to me, is as follows:

"Dr. Berger declared that his organization will establish in Israel an institution investing large amounts of money. Dr. Berger indicated his admiration for what Israel has achieved in settling the new immigrants; in promoting industry; in reclaiming land and utilizing it for the poor. He said that he is leaving Israel full of new knowledge about the country and that his contacts have promoted his spiritual relations with, and his great interest in, Israel.

"Dr. Berger also expressed admiration for the statesmanship of Israel's leaders."

I am sure I need not spell out to you that any resemblance between this report and what I actually did say to the Israeli press is purely accidental.

But the problem is not that simple. If I say so myself, by hard work, I managed to break through a good deal of suspicion and even resentment in Jordan. This "cleverly" designed Israeli broadcast (compare with the Damascus radio which invited me to say my piece directly) can undo a very large amount of the little good I was able to accomplish.

It therefore seemed absolutely essential for me to write my friend in Jordan immediately and to tell him to use his good offices to give my refutation of this trick the widest possible publicity.

Parts of my letter to him were personal and will not interest you. But I think you should have the substance of what I wrote and know the background in the event the episode begins to assume any proportions at home.

I wrote as follows:

"1. The alleged statement is a deliberate, malicious and thoroughly fabricated lie.

"2. By design, I am sure, I was kept strictly away from the Israeli press until the last fifteen minutes of our stay when, at Lydda Airport, all of a sudden two newspaper men descended on me and asked for my impressions of the country. This treatment of ignoring me was no more than I had expected when I entered Israel. I do not particularly blame the Government for this isolation treament, although it contrasts badly with the freedom accorded me in every Arab country we visited. But the Israelis cannot have it both ways—with me. I do not blame their press for not wanting to advertise my visit. But the same press cannot then put words in my mouth which I never uttered.

"3. The interview at the airport was—as you can imagine—not very satisfactory. I was busy with the details of our departure. But—for the record—I shall recapitulate a few of the things I know I said.

(a) I said I regretted that the Israeli Government had felt it necessary to keep us under constant surveillance during our entire stay;

that I had been uncomfortable, for the entire five days we had been in Israel.

(b) I said I regretted that *no one* of any authority had been willing to talk to me despite the fact I had told a Mr. Arad from their Foreign Office I was more interested in talking to people than in seeing the country. Mr. Arad called me every day to report that everyone I had expressed a desire to see was 'unavailable.' I told the press therefore, that my visit to Israel had been 'completely futile.'

(c) One reporter then asked me what were some of the questions I would have asked had I had the opportunity to see the right people. I recall some and repeat them herewith:

1. Why has Israel refused to reestablish the Local Commanders' Agreement on the Jordan border?
2. Why are tens of thousands of 'immigrants' still living in 'transition camps' while there are apparently millions of dollars available to build new Government buildings in Jerusalem and to engage in all manner of public works?
3. Why is Israel, through the Jewish Agency, soliciting immigrants from North Africa instead of consolidating its position and offering to permit some of the Arab refugees to return?
4. Did Israel really think peace would be achieved by 'retaliation'; or wasn't it more likely to be thought that Israel was probing its borders looking for a fight?
5. Didn't the statesmen of Israel realize that time was against them; that they had passed the peak of their strength while the Arabs are just approaching theirs; and this being so, wouldn't it be the part of statesmanship now to show a generous spirit and to make a realistic offer to negotiate outstanding issues looking toward a decent and just peace?

"4. The reporter to whom I repeated these questions said only, 'It is too bad you did not have a chance to ask the proper authorities.' "

On that note the interview ended.

I am sorry to trouble you with this and I hope you will have no need for it. But I wanted you to be prepared if the need should arise.

Cordially,

Elmer

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